MY DAUGHTER HELEN

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

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by Allan Monkhouse

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My Daughter Helen

Chapter I

THE other day I read Browning's "Strafford" again, and the last line of it—"O God, I shall die first—I shall die first!"—left me meditating, recollecting. For my wife had once said that she dreaded to die before Helen. Helen's passion for her mother was strong and natural and yet strange. I was never jealous of it; children should love their mother best. I remember how, when we went out for the evening, Helen would leave a note or a flower on her mother's dressing-table—a greeting for the return. The flower might be a buttercup, the note little more than a bald hope that the evening had been a pleasant one. Sometimes there was a nosegay or an outpouring of endearments; sometimes I was included, kindly or affectionately; she would turn from her mother to me fearing that I felt neglected. When she was very little she would cry when her mother went out, and even all the time till her return. It became quite a bother and I scolded her. The line, the effectual line, to take was that it distressed her mother. And poor Helen's remorse when she had disagreed or quarrelled with her mother was tragical in little. Randal, her elder by about two years, was philosophical about Helen's sulks and tantrums. He was capable of a critical detachment, which she feared; he deflated her moods.

When her mother died and the time for comforting came it was Helen who comforted me. Her mother's illness became a long communion between them. In that deep intimacy there was no place for facile despair. If I was not formally committed to Helen's charge I knew that I had been the subject of solicitude. Perhaps they had worked out a philosophy together; at least they had feelings and emotions in common.

Helen's composure surprised me, but I did not misunderstand it. What grief, consternation, reserves, wild questionings, were behind that aspect that was, with all its poor pathetic flaws, benignant? Already she had learnt to help, to reassure. I didn't know how to help her. I could not give her sentimental make-believes and mere fortitude was too harsh. She was a big girl—about fourteen then, I suppose—and her embrace was an envelopment, a support. We wept together and sometimes our attempts to comfort one another were clumsy. We were like unpractised lovers.

She was not frank with me: she could not be frank. Her mother had received all her girlish outpourings. There would never be such confidence again. And I respected it; I respected that mystery of mother and daughter; I didn't want to be sceptical or analytic even when it seemed that a gentle pressure from them was exercised on me. And now I was conscious of my children's commiseration, and it was precious because it was beautiful in them. Randal and Helen consulted together about me a good deal. I was faintly

amused when I caught them at it. They were young, and in their minds was that sad, baffling question: "What is there for him?" They wanted vaguely to make it up to me. Even Helen must presently begin to realize again that she was young. I believe she had her moments of remorse, of self-reproach, at the discovery.

It was settled that I was to go on living at the old house, that Randal should return to school and aim for his Oxford scholarship, that Helen should return to school. On this last point we had a close discussion. Helen was for giving up school and becoming my housekeeper or, as an alternative, going to a day school in the neighbourhood. Randal listened to my arguments, for I condescended to argue, and was gravely on my side. I was amused and rather gratified to find that his consent to my living most of the year alone was founded on his confidence in my character. He didn't exactly say that, but something charmingly near it. And on the part of these poor young things I was presently to discover a dread that I might sometime marry again. I was old, but not so old as to make it impossible. I could imagine the good Randal conceding the right and Helen distressed in a confusion of loyalties and affections. They sometimes got to the same point by different ways; Randal by justice and logic, Helen by her instinct for realities. But as time went on their apprehensions were allayed.

I settled down again to my work at the office and to those private attempts at literature which have, so

far, failed to bring fortune or fame. One dreads the full confession of failure; the period of acquiescence, indolence, the resort to mere ironies. In some ways this present record is a rebellion against that. I try to catch, to realize, to shape, something of that relation to my children which from now onwards must be the better part of my life. I suppose it will be a gradual compilation, and at first one sees things mainly in the distant past. Then, my thoughts and impressions were shared. We sat hand in hand in the obscurity of the hall when Helen first danced at the village entertainment. Two foolish parents were close to tears. And how happily we have laughed at Randal's laconic, slightly excited "Done it, Daddy," when he won the scholarship! When we watched a schoolboy cricket match it was a devastating experience when Randal got out; philosophy is not proof against such things.

The house was too large for me when I was left alone, but I was reluctant to leave it. The commonplace garden had its beauties and its memories. With our two sycamores and the ash, the great horse-chestnuts in the garden opposite, our bank which screened us from the road with its various shrubs, we had an outlook of multiform greenery. The road, not being a main artery, was comparatively quiet. Altogether it was a setting for quiet drama.

Chapter 2

So Helen was packed off to school and I was unhappy to think of her eating her heart out there. But her letters were not unhappy, and it seemed that she turned the bright side to me. The school was a great place for athleticisms, and with lawn-tennis and cricket, and presently hockey and lacrosse, she had the distractions she needed and more; I waited in vain for the spiritual or even the scholastic to prevail. Her letters were amazingly empty. They were concocted with determination, they were dutiful, and dutifulness was not what I wanted from her. Their endings were emphatic; the tender, conventional messages were vigorously—passionately?—underlined. The letters did not always come regularly and (God forgive me!) I've had dreams of resentment, I've dallied with the luxury of resenting neglect by my children. It's base. It's treacherous. It's a depressing part of the artist's experimental habit, I suppose.

Rarely, a phrase in a letter arrested me, and I came back to it, pored over it, squeezed more out of it than ever was in. She would wish to please me, and she even sent me poems sometimes. I read them eagerly, doubtfully, tried not to be the elderly critic, gave what I could of praise and incitement. More to the point were her drawings, and it seemed that she had a talent for design. She exercised it vigorously, whim-

sically; you could see something of her in this. When she came home for the holidays these faint expressions of her seemed to melt away. She was amazingly large and real. She was of about my height and Randal's; we had measuring competitions, and there was little between us. I believe people disputed about her prettiness; I should have scorned to call her pretty.

It was the summer holiday, and she flaunted it in light frocks. She bore herself as a goddess, and it was absurd to treat her as a schoolgirl. Perhaps there is something in Randal's contention that Godheads must be qualified with humour. If you give your God human attributes they must include humour or you make a stiff, impossible figure of Him; and humour cannot be one-sided. Helen, among other things, was a joke. She used to be a little puzzled when Randal and I agreed that she was a joke. We had to make a sort of defence against her.

Yet intellectually she didn't follow in the brilliant Randal's footsteps. Her schooling seemed to consist very much of imitations of the paraphernalia of boys' athleticisms, of trumpery matters that resulted in badges and titles. Yet the school could point to her as magnificent, and you can hardly grumble at magnificence. You might put it to Randal, as a matter for regret, that she wasn't learned and wise like him, but he, shrewd and magnanimous, would dismiss his great accomplishments with a gesture. Helen, he decided, would do. Helen was all right. It was character that mattered, not learning. And if you suggested that at school character should bring persist-

ence and persistence learning, he would tell you that Helen was always doing something. You can't be always watching your children and nudging them; perhaps, after all, the best kind of parent is the neglectful one. So, in semi-cynicism, one would surmise. I put it to Randal and he considered the point. And then with a courteous inclination of the head he said something nice about a happy mean. I felt like a blushing girl. Recovering, I realized that Randal, too, was a bit of a joke, though I didn't tell him so.

We had a summer holiday together at a Grasmere inn. It cheered me to see Helen and Randal so comradely together. Yet every relation between two implies exclusion. They had their understandings and sometimes I was timid with them. They would receive me generously, but I shrank from a reception. I've gone through life shrinking and recovering. I've not been firm enough or simple enough. And, indeed, some of their understandings were compunctions, considerations about me. They had their kindly little plots, their subterfuges.

Poor Helen wasn't altogether in her element, for to trudge it over the mountains was never quite her line. We explained that the idea was to "plod on and keep the passion fresh," but she hadn't a genius for plodding, though she was not without her persistencies. And so sometimes we left her, as Randal said, biting her thumb, and we started rather sadly, lingeringly; sometimes our company or her prospective boredom turned the scale, and she came with us. If we came home to her we were always curious to

know what she had done. She had played bowls with an old gentleman; she had sulked in the churchyard; she had washed her hair and dried it out of the window; she had drawn a picture of a hen running away from a dog; she had read a tattered old magazine. She didn't talk for effect, but she made us sorry, and we would propose a day on the lake for the morrow. She wouldn't have it if she thought we were pitying her.

Once, when she was with us on the hills I had a tumble that shook me, and I laid down to rest. Helen seemed to come to life suddenly. There was nothing to be done, but she became a masterful figure. She questioned Randal sharply about distances—the nearest water, the nearest help—and contemplated me with an air vaguely professional. I think she was ready to carry me upon her back, and in the meantime she was firm and gentle in her ministrations. As I lay on the ground I winked at Randal, and when he made some reply to Helen smilingly, her scowl was so ferocious that I began to laugh. She glared from one to the other, disconcerted. Poor Helen would affect to fear our subtlety, and did sometimes permit herself to be anxious about the point. In this case there wasn't much point and it was ungrateful to laugh at her. The effects of the fall were nothing, I was ready to go on very soon, but Helen was alert now and guarded me very closely. Randal pretended that I had fallen on purpose to give her a little pleasure. He said that her nature demanded incidents, that she was not fitted for the contemplative life.

Randal left us for a couple of days' climbing at Dungeon Ghyll where his friend Antony Derwent was staying. Derwent was a year or two ahead of him in the school-college progress and a fine, big, athletic fellow. Helen and I went over to see them, for she could walk with an object, and so we made Antony's acquaintance. Helen was very much interested. She was only a girl, but a girl is very nearly a woman, and this came to me with a pang. We watched the boys tackling a climb, and I think that Helen's practical sense revolted from it, but she developed enthusiasm with great rapidity and wanted to join them. But we had to think of our homeward journey, and I felt relieved to get away. She, I could feel, found it very flat to pad off with me, leaving young manhood behind. Bitterly I felt my inadequacy. It seemed that our holiday was spoilt; the placid face of it was deranged. I saw before me enormous difficulties; the control, the direction of all manner of ardencies, rashness. Or the judicious, generous refrain from interference? A father is nothing if he is not magnanimous. Helen cheered up I'm sure, even if she didn't show it, when I said that we must have Antony over some time. She asked whether I meant here or at Darley. I had meant here, but I said "Both." Yes, I was magnanimous. The time would come when I should want Helen too much to myself. I must fight against that.

Yes; Antony caught the eye, and what does that has a good chance of staying in the memory. Helen and I talked correctly about the sound, English type.

In our superior fashion we ridicule the public-school product nowadays, but it turns out some gracious boys. They are not strictly utilitarian? That is hardly the case against them. Graciousness is good, but you can't do without a bony structure; you must be ready to die on the point of honour, but it is well to know how to live; I was to learn presently that Antony was no fool, but when I told Helen that he was a pleasant, athletic fellow I felt that there was some degree of depreciation in this, and that it was hardly fair. She spoke of him with frank admiration; she had none of the subterfuges of the self-conscious misses confronted with a staggering young man. We were pleasurably tired, we became placid and I think we were happy together. My spirits rose and when, after dinner, we came into contact with other guests at the hotel I played what Randal called my rôle of the agreeable rattle. I made them laugh, I laughed myself, I made Helen laugh. And the truth is that I was showing off before her.

Chapter 3

My ambitions began to take on new form or new colour; I wanted to do something for the sake of my children. Here had I been slogging away at novels and plays for the last twenty years, and the accomplishment in terms of fame or money was trifling. And of course there was the implication, in critical work or in casual conversation, that the distribution of these rewards was not strictly according to merit. So, almost embarrassingly, the loyal young people championed me. I've never liked the part of the neglected genius, never put in a claim for it, and there's something ignoble in explaining that success is spurious because it hasn't come to you. One can't be always pointing out that reticence, distinction, isolation, are virtues, but, indeed, the young folk —bless 'em—would go farther than I ever wanted to go in that direction. They would express their contempt for the gross thousands or hundreds in favour of the lean and honourable tens. Yet I could see them clutching pathetically at any odd piece of commendation. Randal's "I see, Daddy, you are mentioned in the *Tribune* this week," had the proper casual tone, and a remittance from America—rather more solid than usual—was hailed by Helen as a turning of the tide. Poor Helen had plenty of natural flamboyancy and, desiring the blaze of success, she would look into

her soul to see what was wrong. If she did follow Randal in a rather comic depreciation of the public taste, she insisted that the neglect of my works was a particular shame. The desire grew to have something to show them, something striking and grandiose.

We should all have enjoyed a howling success. If one were but built that way! I puzzled Helen by telling her that I felt rather apologetic toward some of my prosperous contemporaries. I wanted to tell them that I wasn't half as contemptuous of them as they might suppose. She didn't care for subtleties of superciliousness. I listened to the kindly advice of friends who proposed the larger scheme, the more genial attitude. Why should the man of meagre talent attempt refinements that only genius could make tolerable? If you are second-rate, why not be cheerfully practicable? There's something in it, and sometimes it has seemed that there's everything in it. But it's such a bore not to do your best. If one could knock off the pot-boiler quickly and make something of it, why then—— But a day might come when the astute Randal could not stifle his judgment with loyalty. I should dread the time when he might say, "The old man's getting a bit thin," though perhaps that's not quite how he would say it. And one could see Randal going on for a long way loyally accepting. I could always face him while I did my best.

Sometimes one built castles in Spain and sometimes reversed the process and made dungeons of gloomy thoughts. And, of course, it wasn't as bad as that. The young people would insist on being too proud of

me. If I deprecated this, the humility became an added virtue. They pinned their faith to the narrow band of friendly critics; they resented the breath of depreciation, and any hearty blast of it was madness or malignity. And—talking of loyalties—I must be loyal to a faith so unswerving; yes, I should dread Randal's reception of a pot-boiler.

Helen could appreciate in flashes. Her reading was a mixture of masterpieces and rubbish, with a preponderance of rubbish. In real life she can be practical and measured, but imaginatively she is unsure; she is at the mercy of chance emotions. Sometimes in the holidays the three of us had Shakespeare readings, and though Helen was not keen on the sport, she would join us graciously. We attacked big things, and Helen was certainly an inadequate Cleopatra. I think she found her deficient in the Public School spirit. Yet the play troubled her. I found her afterwards poring over it. She asked me if women often spoilt men's lives. Wasn't it Antony's own fault? Why did I think him fine? I suggested that it's something to be a fool on such a colossal scale.

"Is there anything to be said for her?" asked Helen.

"There's all that Antony said."

She reflected on this and then: "He liked saying such things; he would have said them to some one else."

"The point is that he wouldn't."

"If you admire women like that, what's the use of being good?"

"It's a work of art that we admire, my dear. It's Shakespeare."

"Well, Shakespeare's one of you, Daddy. You all make a great fuss about Cleopatra and Mary, Queen of Scots, and Helen of Troy. Do you want us to be like them?"

"They're spectacular, legendary figures that we've agreed to be romantic about."

"It's funny," she said, "that they should all be bad."

"Oh, but there are others," I said. "Joan of Arc and Cordelia and Florence Nightingale."

She laughed, and I was afraid she might ask me whether I meant the Lady with the Lamp or Mr. Strachey's Florence Nightingale.

Then she said: "I hate Cleopatra. I hate wanting to be like her."

"I don't think you'll be like her," I said.

"What shall I be like, Daddy?"

"You'll be helpful."

"Oh, bother!" she said.

"Don't you want to be?"

"It's what I'm afraid of myself."

"And you'd rather be bringing Antonys to grief?"

"How could she do it?" said Helen.

I think Randal fancied his vigorous reading of Antony's passion—I took most of "the field"—and for some days the young people exchanged phrases from the play—"Let's have one other gaudy night," "I give you joy of the worm," and so on. We were all, in a way, possessed by it. But when the real

Antony—Antony Derwent—came to pay his visit, all this seemed to be forgotten or overlaid. And yet I had a foolish, lingering idea that Helen surveyed this Antony as a possibly heroic figure, possibly to be abandoned and betrayed. He had a grandeur of limb and pose and the face of a kindly Englishman. In the event he was to pay us many visits and, indeed, deserting his Manchester suburb, to be very much "about." His people were in the South, but some theory of "provincial openings" had brought him to the Chancery bar in Manchester. He was a lawn tennis player of some local reputation, and he often accompanied Helen and Randal to our Sports Club. Helen had left school, and had decided against college on the two-fold reason that she wasn't clever enough and that I must be looked after. So she had the official position of housekeeper, which wasn't very onerous, and gave herself a little orgy of fun, sport and sunshine, fine weather delights. Randal, who was always alive to serious or sombre aspects of Helen, said she was on the spree, and I think we all felt that this was a phase that couldn't last. With most girls of her class such an experience comes to an end with marriage, and this became an apprehension to me. I watched her with a jealous eye. I could recall tentative jealousy or distaste when, many years before, the little girl had played at the stupid kissing games, "Shy Widow" or "Postman's Knock," which unimaginative generations pass on. And now I was excessively sensitive about the manners, the approach, of the young men. I don't think I was an exacting,

heavy-handed father, but I had to school myself, and sometimes she would divine what I didn't say. Her own bearing, I felt, was beyond reproach, and yet in reasonable moments I told myself that it couldn't be, it shouldn't be; the world doesn't get on by means of correct attitudes.

I craved her confidence; I wanted her to talk to me of herself; all my life I have asked from her more than she would give. And she seemed to know it and to be sorry for me. I suppose that the deep difference between us is that she is a woman and I a man. I think that she will never know, now that her mother is gone, a perfect confidence. She had happy school friendships, many contacts of a little more than kin and less than kind; nothing very deep. She had a trick of pondering, of a sombre concentration, and it gave an illusion of power; you could believe that she was self-supporting. And yet at times I was afraid of her becoming a rattle, I was afraid of some rash committal; I was afraid, always afraid. I hid it pretty well, I think. We used to have nice conversations, sometimes with cheerful endings. We would discuss—perhaps the initiative was mainly on my side—the question of rigid rules of conduct as against the cultivation of a spirit with natural reactions. Sometimes I was dreadfully inopportune. I remember an occasion when we had returned from the tennis ground on a bright summer day. There was a scrap of leisure yet before us, and I was unwise enough to force the note. The irrelevance, the mustiness of Milton or Keats—mere books—was opposed to the brilliance of

life that we had just left behind. It was unimaginative of me, and poor Helen cried out in despair. She was in tears. "I'm no good," she said. "I care for that, I hate this. No—not hate." (She feared to hurt me.)

And I saw it, I felt it too, and I've often felt it. What is this life of the spirit, represented by old books, mere words, to the entrancing rush of crude young life? The poets wrote in immortal phrases, I dare say. But there is this strong obsession of white-clad figures striving in the game, of the sun shining on gay surfaces, of careless, easy contacts with your friends. The life that absorbs you is the life that matters. The garish day effaces that dim twilight of old shapes and memories enshrined in books. I knew too well what it is to be restlessly indifferent to books. We take them up; we lay them down; we come back to them. And Helen saw in me a task-master who did not understand what she was feeling now. I tried to explain; I abased myself. She thought I was just trying to be kind. Rather, I was trying to be just. And I did make her see something of what I felt. I forced it on her; I compelled her attention when she would have subsided into some mood of facile self-reproach. Why wouldn't she understand that we faced the world together? I think I was ready to waive the trumpery parental authority—at any rate, till some need or menace arose. I wanted intimacies and to be intimate, it seems, is to be equal. I was her natural protector and she was mine.

Chapter 4

So we had a share of bright and jolly life in the summer weather and, naturally, ardent young men were a part of it. In the privacy of my mind I could and did, ridiculously enough, regard them as rivals. Of course there is always the parents' natural fear of misalliance, but I may confess to fear rather of the eligible. Kindly ladies of the neighbourhood would have been ready, doubtless, to help, to warn. The lack of likely young men, the prevalence of the unlikely, have often been the cause of removals, even of the sale of houses. Prudent mothers look about them and think it is time to be off; proximity is enormously more potent than suitability. It was for me to be the prudent father, but I knew that Helen was no flighty miss; her assured dignity of bearing gave one confidence. Yet she was capable of generous mistake.

One meets gallant young rebels to whom prudence is the meanest of vices. And, indeed, what seems to the father a calamity may bring to the child the fullness of life. It is the irony of the human struggle that it is perpetually against the trials that may exalt it. We are always aiming at safety, and safety is the most insidious of dangers. It is just a restful idea, an idea that one must have. We mustn't take our children too seriously. We can but throw them

into the stream to sink or swim. We want them to be paragons, but you cannot cherish a paragon tenderly. We want to assure their future, but only they and the gods can do that. We would keep places for them, tie up money for them; we are of little faith. The family sits round the table and in their common life they are as one. Disaster to any is unthinkable, even separation is but a vague menace. But they separate, they go here and there in the world, they die and fail. Safety, confidence, family pride, are illusions of the brave heart. They are illusions, but the illusion is the present reality.

I was the victim of moods. I would let Helen go her own way or I would have her go my way. I trusted her to value the young men who came about her, and yet I wanted to superintend the valuation. I hadn't much fear of her marrying beneath her, as we say. She wasn't innocent of the snobbery, social or intellectual, that is bred in the high-class boarding-schools, but her niceties generally were temperamental and æsthetic. She wouldn't mistake the shopwalker for the gentleman, and it jarred my honest radicalism that she should be too ready with the distinction. In Darley we had the usual suburban dread of the taint of retail business; though, indeed, a shop might be so big as to accomplish a kind of social purification; did not a super-grocer become an illustrious yachtsman and hob-nob with kings? At the Sports Club, however, we had a reasonably high standard of selection. We were all nice or had some claim to niceness. And Helen knew her way about among

these specious young men in flannels; her distinctions were, very much, mine. I'm afraid I was guilty sometimes of cunning disparagements, but I didn't want to be ungenerous or unfair. I was sensitive to her disappointments with me and hated to be a drag upon the impulses of youth. She could read me sometimes. "You're afraid of young men, Daddy," she said.

"Not young men but a young man," I said.

"I don't think I'm a fool, Daddy."

"You haven't a mother, my dear."

She pondered this and then: "It makes you feel awfully responsible. I wish I could reassure you."

"I do feel sure," I said, "when I think of your character and your tastes—likings."

"Well, then——"

"And then I look at you and think what a wonderful creature you are, and I'm full of doubts again."

"What nice, puzzling things you say, Daddy!"

"Where's the puzzle?"

"Well, wouldn't the danger be in a wonderful young man?"

"You'll create him. You'll draw him from somewhere. You'll inspire him."

"Oh, Daddy! You don't give them a chance. You're so much nicer and cleverer. They can't say these charming things."

And I was happy in her flattery. This was a game that I could play, and it made me feel light as air. We were walking in the garden, and she stopped to disentangle a plant while I sauntered on. Yes, I was light and happy, and I felt that she had pride in me

and confidence. I had not been a dull, exacting father; I would not close the door to glories and delights. My affection for her was humble and pathetic; I became sentimental. She came tripping up to rejoin me, and I took her arm and said: "We'll keep the young man at bay a little longer, then."

"You hope that he will never come," she said.

"No, no," I cried; but she said, sullenly, "Yes."

It was an instinctive protest and I was startled, shaken out of my complacency. All was wrong between us. I said heavy-handed, liberal-minded things. I believe I said that Nature must have its way. I got out of the limelight hastily. And she was quick again to feel my mood; she recoiled from her position, she plied me with reassurances, she was wondering how far she could go in exalting me at the expense of ardent youth. It was rather amusing. I soon worked myself into a position of impregnable wisdom and sympathy. I puzzled her again, for a complete frankness was impossible. I had a foretaste of the bitterness of loss.

And, indeed, it seemed that the wonderful young man was here already. Antony Derwent was about a good deal and we all liked him. His clothes were all right and Helen (my habitual attitude to her at this stage is the lightly sarcastic, but I abandon it readily, frequently) had the sense of clothes; poor old Randal with his fearsome combinations of old garments was something between a joke and a trial to her. Antony's bearing was an exquisite convention with a Public School basis. He was as handsome

as you please, and big, easy, graceful, masterful. To fall in love with him was too obvious. It was what any highly-modernized girl would see must be avoided. Helen was imperfectly, superficially modernized. She could be frank, she liked the likeable, she took short cuts. Oh, he was a dangerous fellow! He was all right and his people were all right; he was so very right and attractive that the world would certainly make way for him. At the Chancery bar he would be a success; solicitors would send him briefs because he was such a nice fellow, and keep on doing it when they found he was no fool. A very dangerous fellow!

His lawn tennis had power and delicacy, and his friends believed that practice in the right company would make him great. Helen and he made a formidable pair, and though she was inclined to be a wild player, she was at her best with Antony; he dominated her; you might say that he subdued her to his rhythm. They beat what was brought against them, and Helen liked that. Of course she couldn't always play with him, and it worried her a little to play against him. Far too often she banged the ball at him, and he scored coolly. I've watched sometimes an undercurrent between them; as they've played against one another I've detected or divined little antagonisms, protests, petulancies, concessions. She could always rely on his generosity. Ah, but they were just young folks playing their game! I put too much into this game of life. I spin fancies and take them for positive, objective bulk. It comes over me sometimes that my Helen exists only in my mind.

She's a hoydenish girl, a Dulcinea. (This is blasphemy—the shallow kind that doesn't hurt.) I do sometimes see her as strangely limited and material. I am not always at my best. It makes me miserable to cheapen her. I've had moments of humiliation and, what is worse, of aridity. And, sooner or later, I recover. The image is the truth. I can never express the beauty of her life in my sight. She will have lovers, but never one like me.

She was pleased when I spoke heartily of Antony, and she wasn't self-conscious. Of course he wasn't an intellectual, but he wasn't a duffer anyway, and Helen was three parts Philistine herself. And one doesn't want to be confined within these "literary and artistic circles." Good raw stuff is the thing, and one can turn it over in the mind. But Antony and Helen were, in their way, exquisite. They were big and exquisite, or so I would have them. And yet what excursions my mind made! What experiments! I had the thought that if Helen were to marry such a man he could not give her all she wanted. She had intuitions, ideas, beyond the range of Antony. She and I had our secret and permanent understandings. Grossly, I could put it to myself that he could never cut me out.

Most of the other young men might be regarded as friendly, insignificant creatures who served to fill out the picture. They were big in their own worlds but not in ours; we exercised a practised cordiality and maintained a considerable reserve. Marmaduke Abney, however, could not be ranked as insignifi-

cant. He appeared as a friend of Antony and was presently adopted by Randal. Antony introduced him, as it seemed to me, with a mixture of pride and anxiety. No; these words are not quite right; let us say approval and deprecation. Perhaps these are not nearer to the shifting quantities of Antony's attitude which were partly, no doubt, the production of my own brain. Antony brought his friend in to tea, which we took in the garden under the shade of our sycamore. He struck me at first as rather a neat little fellow, but you certainly couldn't accuse him of being dapper. There was something unexpected about him, and you felt, with some disconcertment, that he only accepted you provisionally; he had passages of something like affability. We didn't know who he was, and only realized slowly that he had some claim to come of a line of personages.

I dramatize relations too hastily, and so it seemed to me that Antony didn't trust him. Why? Was he afraid that Abney would make too much impression on Helen? Randal got on very well with him, but you can't put on airs with Randal; he is calm, with an impregnable friendliness. The boys compared notes about their schools, and it appeared that Abney was slightly contemptuous about athletics. He hadn't the schoolboy stupidity which some people find so charming, and Helen was checked and a little mystified. I don't quite understand why, but I think she got a little nervous, and she used and then repeated the word "ripping."

"What funny words you use!" Abney said.

In its small way it was insolent. Helen did not flush, but, in a way she had, her face seemed to concentrate; the vagueness went out of it. She said: "Which words?"

"Well, 'ripping,' for instance. I thought it was archaic."

"I'm afraid I do use it stupidly," she said. "Thank you."

It was such a good imitation of humility that Abney was discountenanced. Randal came to his help with something about girls' schools adopting boys' cast-off fashions, but Abney was puzzled. Helen became very sweet and suave with him, and presently he began to see through it, though Helen managed to produce a cunning mixture with some friendliness in it. He kept glancing at her, and I could see that he admired her. But I wasn't going to be obsessed by my recurrent nightmare. I wouldn't spoil the occasion by insane jealousy when we might all talk together casually and happily in the sunshine. Helen couldn't long remain aloof, and presently she regained her normal, happy manner. The young people talked of trifles eagerly, and my attention wandered. Then I heard Abney's snigger—it wasn't a sneer—but I didn't know then that I was destined to become familiar with it. He was talking ironically, sarcastically, of "uplift," and Randal broke in with something about testing morals by competitive examination.

"But aren't we to be good?" said Helen.

She was simple, open-eyed, and Abney, I conceived, was hovering on "How charmingly naïve you are!"

or something of the kind, and only deterred by the fear that he might be caught out again. However, he muttered something about a primitive vocabulary, and it was Randal who said to Helen: "You see, 'good' and 'bad' are such impossibly difficult terms."

"Not when it comes to eggs or oysters," said Antony. Helen and I backed him up with reassuring laughter.

"Don't *you* know the difference between good and bad?" said Helen to Abney.

"Of course there are good pictures and bad books," he said.

"But aren't there any criminals?" Helen asked.

"Crime," said Abney, "is an offence against the law. Perhaps you're thinking of a curious abstraction called sin."

"Well, of course, I know there are sinners," said Helen.

And he was bothered again. He didn't know, as Randal said afterwards, whether she was pulling his leg. He began to talk about criminals rather nervously. Crime involved mystery, danger, all manner of fascinating things. Let us be grateful to the criminal for making an interesting world. Some of them are bold thinkers; anyhow, they break across the conventions. It was schoolboy stuff, and I didn't take it seriously. He was making a hearty tea; he tucked into the cakes rather endearingly. A lad may talk about absinthe, but when he consumes cakes with conviction there can't be much wrong with him.

Poor Antony became an apologetic figure. He was

afraid that Abney was going rather far. I found myself looking at the pair of them through Helen's eyes. Abney was displaying himself and not judiciously, yet Antony seemed heavy beside him. And I asked myself: Can these cynical young moderns act nobly? Are they capable of a great devotion? Perhaps, if I had spoken so, Abney would have called me primitive or early Victorian. I'm a modern myself in some ways, and proud of it. I looked at Randal for reassurance.

Presently Abney and Antony went away, and the three of us sat with the débris of the tea-table before us. I turned to Helen and said: "What do you think of the young man?"

She screwed up her eyes and said: "He wants watching."

"What d'you mean by that?" said Randal.

She was at her ease with us now; she had relaxed. She didn't mean much, it appeared. She said: "You know where you have Antony." She poured herself out a cup of cold, stewed tea and had a good slice of cake.

Randal watched her with amusement. "Do you remember the days," he said, "when, about half an hour after dinner, she used to go to the larder and look for a piece of cold pudding?"

Of course this Marmaduke Abney was negligible. It was Antony who wanted watching. It was ridiculous to put it so. I liked all these young people. There is a lot of talk nowadays about subconsciousness, but I've always known various strata of con-

sciousness, and one of them has commonly been a condition of fanciful apprehension.

Helen said suddenly: "He's very attractive," and I was startled, but on reflection I thought that there was no danger in an attraction so frankly avowed. "What's the attraction?" I said, and Helen had nothing better to offer than "Oh, I don't know."

Randal said: "D'you mean the Unknown?"

Quite seriously Helen said: "Poor boy!" We waited for some explanation, but it didn't come. Randal asked her if she thought him handsome, and she said he was peculiar. Then we had some chaff about Randal's tendency to a Roman nose. They sparred delightfully, affectionately. When Randal asked her if she thought the old man handsome, I said it was time for me to go away. But I watched them secretly from the window for the joy of seeing them together.

Chapter 5

We soon got to know Marmaduke Abney better. Beside "the big three," as he called them, he seemed diminutive. Antony towered over him, and was reproached for turning out spectacular. He was not a great hand at games, but he wasn't hopelessly out of them, and when he was in form he could more than hold his own in the preliminary palaver and the subsequent explanations. Perhaps it was hardly fair to associate him with decadence, but he had been brought up in that dark old house at Lower Heaton, a village of the plain, which seemed the home of decaying gentlefolk. The Abneys were dying out, it was said, and besides the old aunt with whom he lived, Marmaduke's relatives were dim and sketchy. He said that they didn't count, and adopted a burlesque pose as the last of his race.

He was a boy who had done a good deal of quiet shrinking, I think, and now he sometimes adopted a bravura attitude. One mustn't classify the schoolboy hastily, but he was the kind to develop into a wit and an intellectual. He would shrink from emotion, secretly fearing and desiring it. He was healthy enough and had a wiry strain in him. The noble Antony seemed blunt beside him, and Marmaduke would contemplate the great fellow ironically; the sting was taken from this by an engaging manner, a

kind of frankness. He was capable of rallying Antony on his middle-class air of prosperity and attributing it to the lack of ancestors. Helen began by attempting to shield Marmaduke, but presently she was shielding Antony; Randal, aware of the comic implications, suggested that she should let us all shift for ourselves. He compared her to the Jack of both sides in boys' cricket, who is sent in last and gets two innings, but never a good one.

Marmaduke seemed physically inadequate beside the great-limbed Helen, whereas Antony was her match. It startled me to see them together, but I had to get used to it. I was haunted by the ridiculous phrase, "nature's match"; I could believe that eugenics and the trend of the ages were on their side. It was too damnably obvious, and one walks into the traps of the obvious view. I experienced a curious see-saw of antipathies, and would use one boy at the expense of the other. I liked them both; the hearty exterior life went on, and I kept the sub-conscious or half-conscious in order. I suppose I am naturally melodramatic, and I pitted Antony, the genial blunderer, against the dark, guarded, sinister Marmaduke. We don't know people; merely a bit of the outside; and we build upon that, or idealize it into an impregnable image that might just as well be something else. And I was conscious, even then, that it may be the gay fellow who wears the hair shirt.

Marmaduke responded to our not too-marked advances, and we saw a good deal of him. He was a little younger than Antony, had followed his family

tradition in going to Winchester, and then had been pitchforked into Manchester business. He said that the family finances had just held out over the Winchester period, and that now there was nothing left but bits of parchment. When his aunt died there would be an upheaval comparable to that expected for Europe on the demise of the Emperor Francis Joseph.

He hated business and was not well placed. He wasn't communicative about it, but we feared that he had to endure what he interpreted as scorns and slights. His ability might be called static, his wit was spectacular more than forcible. Helen distinguished him; she was, as we say, intrigued by him. It seemed to me sometimes that she had simple, unerring methods of valuation and that she could even apply them to subjects of complexity. But sympathies cannot flow unerringly, and she turned this way and that.

She turned this way and that, and I'm afraid that my secret inclination was against the favoured one. I rehearsed the formal generosities, but I wasn't generous at heart. And yet I was a friendly creature; I liked those boys; I was a good father, a kind father; that, of course. Sometimes it seemed to me that I was idealizing her to the point of creation. Ah! nobody could do for her what I did.

I impose my own subtleties upon her, for she was subtle only as all human beings are. She was about as big as I, and in a woman that seems bigger. She had great shoes that I could wear, she would grasp

your hand like a man. And what a carriage she had! What a stately movement! It would have been stiff if it had not been majestic. I was so proud that when I spoke to others about Helen I had to be careful. It might appear that I regarded her as on another plane from the rest. Publicly, logically, I didn't, but in my heart I was arrogant, exclusive. Her failures hurt me, but she could fail with an air. I resented her little stupidities, I didn't like to see her banging balls into the tennis net or out of court when I felt that it was waywardness, carelessness, some kind of mental deficiency. Our superficial life went on merrily, and the Sports Ground was a centre of it. Marmaduke became a familiar figure there, and it was amusing to find Randal, who felt some responsibility for him, justifying his superciliousness as "the light touch." Marmaduke came down to the house one day, obviously looking for Helen, and said that at the club he could see nothing but hordes of dreary women. It was naughty of him, as it was to say of Miss Coplow that "she plays a good pounding game, but isn't decorative." He taught Helen to speak of the lower middle-class, to which, it seemed, all but a few choice spirits belonged.

One day at the Club we watched Marmaduke playing a single with Antony, and at first Marmaduke got ahead. He was a clever player, who did unexpected things, and Antony was puzzled, but remained calm and steady. Randal said that it was a wit playing a wise man. Presently it appeared that the wit was strained and ineffectual. The tricks looked piti-

fully inept against Antony's strength and vigilance. Marmaduke settled down into a steadier, hopeless game. He became gloomy, maintaining his form, but no more. Helen walked away, and I saw him look after her with an expression that was almost despairing. She was taken into another game, and Antony and Marmaduke became distracted and kept forgetting the score because they were watching her. Other young men were about, but they counted less. I wasn't much afraid of them. I found myself suggesting words of caution—"Choose well! Your choice is brief and yet endless"—and the wisdom of delay. And I had been for romance, for the adventure, the risk; I had ridiculed the mature choice of a mate.

Any daughter of any father was not enough for me; I wanted the relation to be unique, and, looking round me, I had a silly, secret pride because I saw nothing like it. And yet I was not without humour, and I know that you can't spring surprises on the human family. I had this cursed habit of distinguishing, analysing, considering all aspects; even to be natural was a matter of choice. One exaggerates; one cuts a figure. Helen admired me, and I couldn't help playing up a little to that. One becomes pitiful to the children, but I resented her pity, though I knew I must come to it. I wanted to be first with her as a man is first with his sweetheart. I was still a man among women, but I had left behind me their world of loves and lusts. My love now was purged of sex. I was spiritual. Before these ardent youths I could feel myself the protector of a shrine. I set this down,

illogical and inhuman as it is. Perhaps it is no more than the lees of egoism. And all the time I was just a good, careful father and, to those who threatened my peace, a good friend.

Chapter 6

I MADE a lot of qualities out of Helen. I conceived her as serene, equable, a tower of strength and, again, as sensitive and shrinking. I saw in her a superb courage, and yet I remembered how, as a child, she would lie to save herself. The contrast was with the scrupulous Randal, who didn't seem to know about that alternative of lying. I don't know that she ever became quite truthful, but she ceased to lie for her own advantage. I think she would sometimes lie helpfully. Her pity was in excess; she would react too readily to the miserable and oppressed. Yet the manifestation of this pity was sweet to me. I have said that I resented its application to myself, and yet there have been times when I have "played" for it. If I drooped or faltered she was quickly at my side. She watched me, and I wanted her to be conscious of me; I liked to be in her thoughts. I did appeal to her, but I wouldn't encourage a morbid preoccupation. I, too, stood for life and joy. We were sentimental together sometimes, but I could take a high hand with her; I could rouse her admiration and bask in it. She made much of me; sometimes too much; she would see me sometimes as a tragic or at least as a pathetic figure. If you force for pathos you can find it anywhere, and here was I getting old and grey, my mate gone, physical disabilities asserting them-

selves. What material for a pitiful daughter! I think my high spirits sometimes provoked her wonder. They were not sham, and I think she came to understand that you must be loyal to joys as well as to sorrows.

No; I wasn't just a tame, middling father. By God! These boys had a tremendous rival in me. We've had our jokes about it. My humour is intermittent but unquenched. Of course I knew that the stars fought for them, that nature was on their side. I was ready to efface myself at the right moment; I wasn't going to be a dog in the manger.

Randal would sometimes watch Helen and me together with an expression something between benevolent and sardonic. He said he liked the ceremonial and that my manners put him to shame. Is it ridiculous to open doors for your daughter? When Randal talked about symbols of tenderness one became self-conscious. Of course I was careful, and wouldn't give material for jest to the bluff, hearty fellows who called to their Jills and Joans to fetch slippers or pipe. And Helen didn't wait to be called.

In her pity I had a rival—Marmaduke Abney. Family disasters came upon him. His aunt died, and their house was sold. There was next to no money left, and Marmaduke seemed to be quite without effectual supporters. The feudal system had come to wreck; the solid earth was dissolving. So it seemed to us in Darley, where we were not without aristocratic connexions—such precious links as a cousin married to a baronet or some obscure relationship to a

ducal house. That Marmaduke should be in straits was "a shame," and, indeed, he might fairly reproach society with having mismanaged him. He was miserable in his work; he was an instrument too fine for it and ineffectual. We all tried to be kind to him, and I think Helen found him difficult to mother. Between two young people the limits of mothering are not easily defined, and Marmaduke must encounter rebuffs if he misinterpreted Helen's solicitude. They were comic to me at times, but it was serious comedy. I was afraid that Helen might go too far with him or that he—poor devil—might misapprehend deeply. He was cunning sometimes in his reading of her concessions, he wasn't chivalrous. He managed wonderfully to evade the dismal and lugubrious by burlesquing them. He was jocular with "Sister Helen," and threw tags of Rossetti at her. I was grateful to him for sending her to the poem, over which she pored for some days. Boldly but with the usual ironical discount, he said that all she wanted to become a perfect woman was more adventures among masterpieces. She bit her thumb—she had some childish tricks—gravely considering that.

Both evidence and inference convinced us that Marmaduke was making a poor fist of business. He gave us humorous sketches of his Manchester life, but I think they were carefully chosen and edited. He was ashamed of his environment and dreaded the call of a friend. Antony Derwent had looked him up at the warehouse, and had been received with coldness and embarrassment. Poor Antony was hurt, for he had

gone in kindness and comradeship. "It's pretty beastly," he said, "but the point is that it might happen to any of us." Marmaduke described himself as immersed in the lower middle-class. I think it was some solace to him to accept the pose of the aristocrat enduring grimly. And yet, as Randal said, this was another case of the map, a mile to the mile. In other words: "Here's this fellow posing as himself in his habit as he lives." We were to suppose a difference in mental attitude, but perhaps that wasn't much. Certainly he had some grit. He maintained his form though his clothes were shabby; I've known Randal reject his smart suit when he knew Marmaduke was coming.

Randal had rooted him out of his poor lodging in Manchester, and brought him for the week-end. At Sunday evening supper Randal put the thoughtless question, "What's the matter with your hand?" and instinctively Marmaduke whipped it under the table. Then he brought it out and defiantly held it up. It was his right hand, and there was a curious horny smoothness extending from the outside of the little finger to the beginning of the wrist. He told us that it was the result of tying up parcels on a counter. "Hundreds, thousands, millions of 'em," he said. "It's the mark of my trade, my brand. And I bring it out here. It cleaves to me." He was bitter; it was lamentable.

"It's no worse than inky fingers," I said, and accused Helen of giving me a fountain pen that leaked. Her face was hard set; I knew the look from

her childhood when she was resolute to keep back tears. Randal grasped the nettle; he made a fine diversion of it. "You dashed aristocrats," he said—"you think the world's to be run by men with manicured nails. You should be proud of the sign of honourable toil."

"Honourable!" said Marmaduke. He didn't pursue the vein.

Then he amused us by enumerating the qualities necessary to make a good salesman, which should be the first object of his ambition; it was incredible that he could ever fill the part. He told us about his efforts to get suitable lodgings, and the offer of an elderly warehouseman, Mr. Pring, to house him. Reluctantly but inevitably he accompanied Mr. Pring home and partook of high tea with the family, which was completed by Mrs. Pring and a daughter, upon whose attributes he preferred not to dwell. A bedroom was inspected, and then Mr. Pring proposed a game of "all-fours." Marmaduke couldn't tell us whether this was an obsolete game or the latest novelty. He didn't grasp the rules, for his nerve was shattered when he realized that the social advantages of living *en famille* were being displayed. It was not intended that he should have a sitting-room to himself. In mortal terror, fearing discourtesy, he invented the legend of a doctor, who had insisted that he must always have a bedroom with a south aspect. None of them knew which way the house pointed, but Mr. Pring believed that the bedroom was due south. "And," said Marmaduke, "I shook my head sadly. I said that the

moment I entered the room I knew it was north-east. I made some hazy calculations about the position of the sun. Then they proposed another room, and I said, 'Are you on gravel?' That bothered them, and when Pring asked what it mattered when you were cellared throughout, I said that, though I didn't care myself, a promise to a mother was sacred. I got going, and carried it off with a high hand. I saw freedom in front of me, and began to enjoy myself. They thought I wasn't quite sane, and wanted me to go. I suggested another game of all-fours, as I wished to master the intricacies of the game; I inquired the time of the latest train, and even ventured on 'Is the bedroom ready?' Oh, I did it thoroughly. They wanted to throw me out."

He gave us his opinions on Manchester business and they were naïve and cynical. Perhaps he had got among a bad lot. There was no essential difference, he assured us, between a business man and a bandit; the one thought—or said—that honesty is the best policy, the other that robbing is. Compare this honesty with any sort of decent intercourse between human beings! "Their idea of honesty is to keep out of jail. Tying up parcels for bandits! There's a career!"

I tried to get him a little work on the *Herald,* hoping for some development. He didn't get the hang of things. He was refined, whimsical, audacious—the kind of contributor that you don't like to rule out finally, but boggle over every time. It fizzled out. It seemed impossible to hold him up. His wages were

a pittance. He grew shabbier, and old well-cut garments were succeeded by the ready-made. He began to look furtive, or so it seemed to me. Antony came to me one day, and begged me to use my influence with him. He was gambling, it appeared. Merely small Stock Exchange transactions with outside brokers. And he lost, of course he lost. I sent him an invitation through Helen to come out to see us, and he declined it. Helen went and fetched him. She called for him at his lodgings, and made him come. It was unconventional but magnificent. She brought him out, so to say, by the ear, sniggering. It wasn't heroic, and yet Helen seemed to find something heroic in his attitude. He jested insatiably. Of course I talked to him like a father. Why be a common gull? Why make things worse? Didn't he know that the dice were weighted against him? That kind of thing. But Marmaduke assured me that he knew what he was doing. The dice were weighted, but only a little. If you speculate they always are, but there's a chance to win. Say that instead of evens it's four to three against you. Why speculate at all? "How otherwise am I to get out of this hole? To remain as I am is to lose. My dear sir," he said, "you look at it from the point of view of one who is somewhere. I'm nowhere." There was a sort of logic about him that was very depressing.

He always had an eye on Helen. He was an actor of extraordinary skill and of a kind of sincerity. He was always putting his case, or part of it, in some subtle way. Your case may be very much yourself.

He was certainly interesting, as these egoists often are. The reticent Antony was a block beside him; at the best a noble effigy. So I felt sometimes though I liked and trusted Antony. He lost ground with Helen, who re-acted to him spasmodically. Poor Helen! I was beginning to regard her as incalculable, wayward, incapable of guiding herself. Her calm, assured aspect was, pathetically, a cloak.

The change was that she had become marriageable, which means that she had become a subject for fatal mistakes. In "provincial" society we can't get it out of our heads that mating is for life unless disaster intervenes. Brilliant young people in exalted circles show us how easy it is to correct mistakes. They flit about, they are fickle, unkind; they are incapable of a deep failure; years of comradeship and affection, the common life, are little to them; their shallow roots are easily torn up. It was impossible that Helen should look into the eyes of a lover and think: When I am tired of him I can give him up. We are illogical? We tie a mill-stone about the fresh, natural impulse of youth? But we aim high. We aim at the best of all. It is good fun to be a philanderer, but it isn't good enough.

Helen was of the staunch kind, and she was impulsive, generous. She was no fool, but her wisdom was not of the canny order. I hinted cautions to her, I talked enigmas, and it might as well have been plain speech. Of course Marmaduke wasn't eligible; there was obvious comfort in that. Implicitly she appealed to me to trust her, but this committed her to nothing.

She would have me trust her deeply; I wanted some limited and explicit assurance. We were not estranged, but reserves crept in. I couldn't be all in all to her. I would have renounced those old, vain dreams. They were part of the past, futile, ridiculous. I suppose I shall go on playing with them for ever. She must save her own soul. I could only stand and admire. And I could see her as noble and pitiful, above mischance.

Chapter 7

MARMADUKE managed to get his affairs into a shocking mess. He borrowed where he could, which was where he shouldn't, he was alternately penurious and reckless, he had his shrewd subterfuges and monstrous fatuities. He had shreds of a fantastic honour and little moral sense. It is degrading to believe that the people about you are bandits even if you see something of an ideal society beyond them. Marmaduke was losing ground, and he hadn't much ground to lose. He didn't give satisfaction to the employers whom he regarded with contempt. He gave us the benefit of the huge joke that they considered he was not conscientious. Conscientious! And they were bandits. If you asked him what, precisely, he meant by that, he was a little vague in relating moral maxims to trade customs. Certainly some of the customs seemed queer. Conscientious! I suggested that they meant conscientious towards themselves. "Just so," he said; "my country, right or wrong. But it isn't much of a country."

At my invitation he came to the office to talk over his position. I didn't know what to do, but I felt that something should be attempted. It wasn't easy to do anything with him. He was too intelligent; he could counter everything I said. I'm not pompous

and I couldn't treat an intellectual equal as a boy. I was conscious of the curious, dim light thrown on our interview by his irony. It wasn't quite fair or decent of him, for I was going out of my way in trying to help. I suppose he was anxious, nervous, on the defensive; he was perfectly polite, hardly resentful, but he annoyed me a little with his habit of evasion, his air of putting aside and disposing of *that* when I brought up a point. He was dignified and I couldn't penetrate to much. I couldn't make him pathetic, and yet he was pathetic. More than that—I could conceive him as desperate.

And I had him at an unfair advantage; I was Helen's father. My sixth sense told me that this mattered enormously to him. Poor lad! Poor fellow! To love Helen and to see her unattainable! What could be done with him? He was produced by obsolete systems, traditions; carefully unprepared for the world. Such shifty supports as he had had given way, and his money-earning capacity seemed almost negligible. And yet he wasn't negligible. He had a kind of critical, disembodied value. At times I felt my mind to be slow and dull beside him. He had to me what I may frankly call an aristocratic charm, and my heart sank when I thought of Helen. His taste was too fine to be condescending to me, but he was wrapped up in class consciousness and, at the same time, logical, sceptical. He didn't answer to my conception of a lover, but I could see that he was, as they say, intriguing. He wasn't frank. He gave me half-confidences. It was a singular case of abandonment,

for a man of his class doesn't commonly lose parents, friends, money, all solid supports in the course of a few years. I think his pride narrowed the circle of possibilities, and any conceivable helper was "poor as a rat." He had prepared a schedule of his debts, and doubtless had meant to consult me about it. He flourished it airily, he waved it aside, I mustn't be bothered with it. I grew rather impatient. I let him go, though I hadn't done with him.

And then he came back and knocked at the door. He entered hesitatingly and said, "Ought I to knock? Flunky manners? I never know what's right with these bourgeois." I looked at him inquiringly and he went very pink. "Good God, sir!" he said. "You don't think I meant——?"

"No," I said, "but it isn't a correct attitude to anybody."

He stood there hesitating. "You'll wonder why I've come back," he said.

"Sit down, my dear fellow; I'm glad to see you back."

"Yes, but you're trying to help me and I ought to be frank," he said. "I owe you something of frankness—frankness, you know." The word had become an obsession. He was nervous—I liked him better so. He tried again: "Mr. Daunt, perhaps you know—you ought to know—I wish to be frank—Oh, what a fool I am! The fact is—I should tell you—I'm in love with Helen—in love, you know."

There was sincerity in his shocking diction. He looked at me inquiringly, defiantly, and I didn't speak

at once. I didn't like meeting him with the discouraging platitudes that were inevitable.

"It's absurd, of course," he went on. "I'll spare you the explanation of that. I see it. As a suitor—*pour rire,* you know. I thought it right to tell you."

I thought I saw his point, but I asked him: "Why do you tell me this now?"

"Because you have it in your mind to help me if you can. I don't suppose it's possible, but if you did put me in the way of something better—earning a bit—well, it might be against your own interests."

"Why?"

"You wouldn't want me to marry Helen, would you? Well then, your policy should be to crush me."

"My dear boy!" I murmured.

"From your point of view I'm no good."

"And from your own?" I said. It was a cruel question, and it came as a mere repartee. What a child he was, after all! As he stood before me frowning and blinking, I felt an immense sympathy for him, I've rarely felt more for any human being. I felt like going over to his side. It would have been ruefully, I suppose, but one responds to a revelation. In a practical world he might be impossible, but man to man or man to child he wasn't negligible. He didn't reply to my question, and I put another one:

"Does she know?"

"No. Yes. How can she help knowing?"

I resisted an absurd inclination to tell him that he wasn't big enough. I thought: She pities him. I imagined myself saying so, but I wasn't as cruel as

that. It was time for common sense, for conventional fatherhood. So I said obvious things about youthful fancies and not being in a hurry and being able to support a wife. Perhaps his castles in Spain came crashing down. And then the young fool, apropos of nothing in particular, said:

"I suppose you have the prosperous Derwent in mind?"

It was so outrageous that I was sorry for him rather than indignant. It's an awful thing to check youthful exuberance. Here was the boy all ready for joy and love and, like the patriarch in the Bible, I had to tell him to serve his seven years and then, perhaps, another seven. His position was not even as favourable as that. Jacob was unfairly fobbed off with Leah, but he was a man of regular habits who always gave satisfaction, and he was sure to come out all right in the end. Marmaduke didn't seem to have a chance anyway except—and I mustn't hint it to him—as an object of pity. Helen was pitiful, but she couldn't marry on pity. I couldn't bear to think of her glories coming to that.

Such things were in my mind as I stared at Marmaduke without replying to him. He lost all his defiance. "That was a horrible thing to say," he muttered. Then he went on: "You see me a shabby sort of failure. You haven't seen the struggle. I've endured a good deal. I don't know why I should say this to you. I wanted to say it to some one. I've a kind of pose with Helen, I think, and it wouldn't fit with that. Randal's a good chap, but I must pretend to be stoical

with him. I think I am rather stoical. I don't know why I say all this."

I got up and clapped him on the back. "You've kept your form wonderfully, my boy; I admire it," I said. It was an inspiration of the moment, and I felt it thrillingly. I turned away when I saw tears starting to his eyes.

"Don't despair," I said.

"You mean——?"

What did I mean? I don't think I meant much. One says reassuring things: It'll soon be over, or You'll find it some day or You'll get there sooner than you expect. And then one day, unfairly, it is taken that you meant something. I was resolutely vague with Marmaduke. And what could he expect? It wasn't likely that he would be recognized as a suitor.

I managed to get an introduction to the principals of his firm, and they granted me an interview. It was unusual and they were puzzled, wondering what I was up to. One was of young middle-age and the other elderly. In manner both were guarded and peremptory. It struck me that they divided the world into two classes—those from whom they bought and those to whom they sold. The customer is sacred, and I wasn't a customer. We began with a slight misunderstanding, which, however, was of their own creation. They affected to believe that I had some thought of "introducing capital" and so fortifying Abney's position in the firm. When I disclaimed any such intention they stared at one another and then at me. I explained that I merely wanted to know

how the boy stood, what were his prospects, chances. He hadn't any parents or guardians, and one felt the responsibility of a friend. The more portly of the two gentlemen, glancing at my card, said: "But—er—Mr. Daunt, what business is it of yours?" The other laughed harshly with, "Yes, where do you come in?" I said I was afraid I didn't come in to much purpose; I simply wanted to help the lad and so had ventured——

The elderly and more portly one interrupted me, holding up his hand like a policeman regulating the traffic. "Mr.—er—Daunt," he said, "we had better tell you at once that Abney does not shape to be of much use to us. He has no push, he lacks the first requirement of a salesman. We have given him chances but he doesn't take them. Now, you know, or you should know, that a good salesman takes no denial. He declines to be shaken off, he returns to the attack, he wears down the buyer's opposition. Of course, he must use some discretion. But Abney cannot be induced to employ what one may call legitimate forcing methods. Certainly he's a gentlemanly fellow, well-connected and so on. We've been anxious to do what we can for him. But really——"

It was my turn to interrupt. "Is there nothing but salesmanship in your business?" I said. "Here is a man with an uncommonly acute mind. Is he of no use to you unless he can bully people into buying?"

"Do you suggest that he should manage our business for us?" the younger man asked.

I murmured "Not at all," while he of larger mould

—Mr. Hucklow was his name—assured me that a young man was not going to get on in the home trade if he couldn't sell goods. "And I may say, Mr. Gaunt—er—Daunt, that salesmanship is one of the highest and most important functions in commerce."

I bowed assent. I was the humble amateur benefiting by their experience. I mustn't say anything to damage Marmaduke, and contented myself with a further eulogy of his mental equipment. They listened to me indulgently, rather incredulously. Mr. Hucklow said: "You are a sort of literary man, I believe."

"Sort of—Yes," I said, relishing what was one of Helen's favourite constructions.

"And you think you can teach us our business?"

"Far from it," I said. I rose, thanked them, flattered them a little, tried to shape the end of the interview.

Mr. Hucklow said he thought Marmaduke might do better in shipping than in the home trade. "Less contact with customers," he said.

I was inspired to say: "Ah! If only you had a shipping department." They glanced at one another with an expression which said: This man's no fool, after all. I believe they had thought of such a development. It was irrelevant to the present issue. We parted with politeness, and the younger man gave a sudden human turn to things by asking what my golf handicap was now. I was a little startled. I told him I thought it was six, and he nodded: "I thought they'd bring you down for that last return of yours," he said. I was astonished. It appeared

that he made an exhaustive study of the golf reports in the newspaper. He knew the handicap of every prominent golfer, and I was flattered to be ranked in their company. What a hobby! What a culture!

These men had no interest in Marmaduke beyond the question of his utility. I certainly wouldn't say that they were rogues, and perhaps bandits is a strong term. It seemed to me that they would be honest if they were quite sure it was the best policy.

I told Helen something about it, but we skirted things. I didn't mention Marmaduke's appearance as a suitor, and she said nothing about him as a lover. I was coming round to the idea of Antony as inevitable, and Marmaduke was but a friend in distress. A kind of punctilio induced me to suggest to Helen that she wasn't bound to me, that she must have a life of her own, a profession, vocation, trade; whatever she pleased; she might even, some day, get married. She bent her brows on me and asked whether I wanted her to go. I said that parting was inexorable, that she had life before her, and so on. I wasn't inspired, I ground it out conscientiously. Warming to the theme argumentatively, I pointed out that there would be positive advantages in leaving me alone. All my life I had had—among other and stronger inclinations—a hankering after living alone. I had never done it; I had never been a striving young man in lodgings; I had missed many experiences. I didn't want now to hinder people who were positively alive. Before me was only an aftermath, a remainder to be lived out gallantly or at least decently; she mustn't

think she was going to mollycoddle me. I became jocular in my assumption of the rôle of venerated elder continuing to do his bit. I began to enjoy the attitude, and, indeed, it wasn't far from an aspiration. She drew me up with: "You talk bosh, Daddy, but I don't say that I shall never leave you."

She was no fool. I didn't see the inside of her mind, but that was clear to me. She was no fool, and yet she was one who might act as a fool; that is to say, according to our current conceptions of folly. And, at my best, I rejoiced in this; I believed in her and not in my own shrinkings and precautions. I hadn't her confidence, and I suppose I hadn't the right to it. My attachment, my love, was romantic. I wanted a noble destiny for her, something vaguely towering.

To the inflated mood these young men were inadequate. My rivals! I hadn't got rid of that idea, though it seemed sometimes but the ribald ghost of old imaginings. I turned my harmless irony on the triumphant Antony. He had the fatuous air of a conqueror conquering nothing in particular. He was normal; strong, handsome, skilful, a good fellow, no fool. I keep finding out that people are not fools, and it is disconcerting when you want to control them. Antony got on well in the world, and it spoke well for the world. He was well placed. He was eligible, infernally eligible. Blatant, flamboyant success might be destructive of charm, but Antony was a good and gentle giant. You wanted him to have a good time, and, strangely, you could be afraid that he wouldn't.

Meanly, foolishly, I had once spoken of him to Helen as our local Apollo. Her stupid silence punished me. And I thought of these noble young creatures in sorrow and decay. I recalled the poem of Lascelles Abercrombie where the decrepit, shrunken figure reveals himself with "I am Apollo." I raised the ghosts of beautiful women who, in my time, had flitted across the stage.

I wasn't so base as to acquiesce: It has happened to me; let it happen to you. And I was never an Antony. Perhaps many modern women would scorn his obvious virtues. Can they make water flow uphill? Can they subdue their senses to the servitude of the mind? Mere gloriousness won't appeal, I suppose, to a schooled or a twisted nature. At times Antony filled my eye and I followed him entranced. He had no need to pose, but if he did, it was magnificently. With such a broad, genial nature, the woman must be already half-way to love. And yet they follow inner promptings; even in love they would be exclusive and peculiar.

So, from time to time, Helen and I pecked at the philosophy of life. We said generous things, right things to one another, but we were at a distance. We said that nothing could separate us really, that nothing should separate us; husband, children, if ever they did come, would make the bond between us stronger. In our moments of exaltation we believed this, but there was more of height than of depth in our communion. At the bottom of my heart there was a well of bitterness. With a child the mother must

come first and the father stands aside; at the most, he is a friendly interloper. And then, it may be, his influence waxes; easily he may become his children's hero. And then they discover that he has feet of clay; they are determined realists, and an appeal to sentiment and tradition will not do. He may save the situation by sympathy and humour, or he may be discarded, become a landmark, a relic. It seemed to me sometimes that Helen and I protested too much. We would exceed the limits of our nature and give a fine name to the excess. Such thoughts were disloyal to my love.

Chapter 8

THE passionate lover does not demand to be understood; he may have deep preoccupations which he has no wish to share or he may assign limits to communion. I had sometimes put my books in Helen's way. I had made tentative, pathetic efforts to interest her in them; I feared to oppress, to bore. Watching her turn the leaves I was sensitive to all movements; I detected droopings, languors; I wondered where she was in the book. She expressed, she maintained, a decent appearance of interest, and she was too wise for an excessive exaggeration of it. She took up points, she responded to little personal matters, she would permit me to take for granted any kind or degree of approval I might choose. It was all deeply disappointing, but it could be accepted; at least it was better than a pretentious sympathy. She wasn't so stupid, of course, as to look at me simply as a failure. The good Randal would have prevented that. He, dear fellow, paid me an exaggerated respect. It was comic; it became a sort of crime for any man to have a success on the stage, and a novel with a large circulation was self-condemned.

The friends of the hole-and-corner artist come to him and suggest that, for once, he should give up niggling and attempt something big. A broad canvas

and dash on the paint! A group of heroic characters in stupendous adventure! Something hearty and vivacious. I've thought of trying; I've turned it over in my mind. And then there comes again the elusive vision of something more remote and perhaps more attenuated, and I must be true to myself and pursue my own search for beauty. The narrowing audience should be a warning, I suppose, but a great artist, a Henry James, may refine and refine till there's no audience left, and he does all to the glory of God. He lives, at last, the conventual life, he fades from the world, he is true to himself. It is an ideal picture. The real Henry James is a fount of inspiration, a source of the world's vitality.

I had always Randal, and him too I watched out of the corner of my eye. My work drew hopelessly, depressingly, away from Helen, and at times I could have felt reproachful, but there was neither justice nor interest in that line. She might be incredulous, but she was loyal, and I must acquiesce in division; I invented for private use a title of ridicule: "The man with two shrines." I wanted her to be plain and honest and leave the tortuosities to me, but I didn't want her to be stupid. She wasn't exactly that. She was instinctive, not studious. She had sudden perceptions that seemed like inspiration; she did not falter in questions of taste. I suppose she was indolent, but she could work like a horse.

On occasion Helen could play up and she was not behind Randal in interest—certainly not in excitement—when one of my plays was produced in Manchester.

It was "only" by an amateur society and represented, I suppose, something of a narrow and belated enthusiasm. One likes approval from one's neighbours, but not to the point of "kidding"; those who have lacked success are apt to suspect any sporadic or local enthusiasm; they fear that it may be because they are good fellows or that people are sorry for them. Yet the sensitive subject will respond to small provocations and the natural man likes to be the centre of some flame or glow of life. Randal and Helen insisted on making an occasion of "The King of the Tambours," and Randal was ready to explain to anyone his theory of the ironical qualifying of romance, while Helen thought it all just beautiful. I suffered, as usual, from some desire to explain myself, but to the sage Randal this was hardly necessary; he had the hang of things, if not unerringly, at least to the purpose. Helen wanted a fuss and I think, poor dear, that she thought the difference between Manchester amateurs and a genuine West End production could be made up by demonstrations of pride and affection. Her loyalty and anxious championing charmed me even when I felt compelled to make heavy-handed disclaimers, to labour the exposition of the minor talent. There is (I explained) the genius who will burst through any bonds and justify himself in any circumstances, and there is the man of talent who fits into a place in the great world, serves it and draws his reward in cash or consideration; and then there is, too, the man who, stupidly or arrogantly or whimsically, acts as

though he were a genius though he isn't strong enough to compel the public to take what he would give 'em. He may save his soul, but not much more.

Platitudes that looked like modesty and perhaps were not very modest! Randal nodded judicious approval, but with some qualification. I think he wanted to create an extra class for me—that of the men whose high talent (his moderation forbade the easy use of the word genius) must be conditioned by something of austere withdrawal. Helen, however, had not much use for all this. She wanted her sympathies to be in full flood; she glowed and kindled. The more modest your genius, the more heroic figure he is, and Helen didn't believe in doing things by halves. She had read the play and brought it into her conversation, missing points sometimes and making shrewd ones that weren't there. She radiated admiration and I basked in it. I liked it. Oh, I liked it! Randal and I laughed at her and ridiculed her, but we did it very nicely and hardly to the point of deflation. One isn't sternly logical about a daughter's love. But in the world we belonged to the world. I pretended that Helen and I were just father and daughter and accepted for her the share of common eulogies, disparagements; I spoke of her with casual facetiousness. When I was in company my heart beat faster when she appeared and yet I was frequently critical. I realized sometimes that my idealizations were flimsy. She didn't always play up; she made it impossible to keep on a high level. We were dull and stupid

together sometimes and, vexed and depressed, I felt the victim of illusion.

"The King of the Tambours" was performed in a rather chilly hall before an audience that took it a little too seriously. Though I have always intended my plays to have a human and general appeal, they have been thrust persistently into the recondite department. On this occasion the environment suggested austere virtues, and I could have wished for a stuffy theatre box that would have been less bare and bleak than the front form. However, there was some core or essence to the entertainment, and I was more excited, I think, than anyone else in the audience. You have mixed emotions when middling amateurs do your play, but to see it at all, to hear your words spoken, is an experience. I sat beside Helen and she held my hand. Her grasp tightened and relaxed. She was near me in spirit. I don't know, thinking of it now, whether she responded to the play as I did, or whether her intense sympathy was directly with me. We were together and I was extraordinarily happy. Misreadings of the play or clumsy details didn't matter much; I could do my own fashioning and idealizing.

Antony and Marmaduke were with us, and they helped to make a kind of family claque. Marmaduke was cunningly appreciative, and Antony had a good bass note of applause. It didn't seem to me—I confess—that the audience was moved sufficiently or moved quite in the right way, but I couldn't make up my mind whether they were too stupid or too

sophisticated. The young people saw nothing wrong. It was a pretty good imitation of success, and that I should be unable to look on this as a stepping-stone to fame made me feel mature and disillusioned. But it wasn't my policy to be a wet blanket or to spoil the fun by any ironical subtraction. Randal's shy heartiness struck me as a little pathetic; he seemed to be ready to agree with Helen in taking garlands and laurel wreaths for granted. It was pathetic, but the pathos was a reaction from my side. For I was the centre of this rather futile, pathetic display. And all these young people playing up to me so anxiously and earnestly and kindly, taking the most favourable view, eagerly loyal, were beautiful and inspiring. Oh yes! One must have stern and austere criticism in this world. I can do a little in that way myself, and Randal can't be deceived for long nor Marmaduke perpetually bridled. But this was another matter. I dare say they all thought the play very fine, but their criticism didn't matter; their eager faces turned to mine told me of something deep and exquisite.

The audience warmed to their work, and I was gratified to believe that I got through their veneer of formal criticism to emotions. Finally they made a good show of enthusiasm and I was hauled up to the platform to make my bow. The cries for "Author" were succeeded by those for "Speech." Randal told me afterwards that he overheard: "We ought to get away from these tricks of the commercial theatre," and I could have agreed when I found myself fatally entangled in clichés about the modern drama. I caught

Helen's eager eye and didn't like to be spiritless and pedantic before her. I changed my note, and I think I said one or two spirited and incisive things; anyhow, the applause was brave.

We got away after bearing the brunt of private congratulations. Helen accepted them generously for me whenever I sought to evade them. It appeared that the drama had taken a turn for the better, and that we had that night lighted a candle that would not be put out. We walked to the station through quiet, echoing streets trailing clouds of glory. Helen had my arm, and on the other side Marmaduke was nervously hilarious. And then it occurred to me that he would be left in Manchester while the rest of us went off in the Darley train. I didn't want him with us, but I hated to leave him. There he was, left alone on the platform, and he waved his hand and walked briskly away just as though he had somewhere to go to. I felt sure that he hadn't, and that he was unutterably dreary at being left alone. I honoured him for that quick walk away. I looked at Helen, and she was staring after him strangely. She sat beside me, and the expression of her profile was obscure. I was uneasy, and I think we were all oppressed by the thought of Marmaduke. Randal tried to dismiss him with "It's a shame to leave poor old Marmy behind," but we fell silent. I tried to bring them back to my play, and Randal and Antony got involved in some superficial, futile argument. Shy egoist as I am, I tried again to bring them to something more interesting, but we didn't get on. Helen seemed

to be brooding in tragic intensity, and I was convinced that she was overdoing something; she had no right to look like that. She watched Antony. Studying him? Appraising? Balancing? I pressed her hand, and she responded mechanically.

Chapter 9

I was a little surprised when Helen questioned me, with some circumstance, about money matters. She hadn't hitherto been very good at listening to my explanations, and I told her again that her few hundreds of income, coming from her mother, would be in her own control when she was twenty-five or at her marriage, if that was by my consent. "Then, supposing I married some one you didn't like, you could keep us short?" she said, and we had some humorous exchanges on the point. I suggested that a few hundreds might be a nice help, but that they wouldn't keep a family handsomely, and "Just a living wage," she said thoughtfully. "Do you think me mercenary?" she continued, and I assured her that every properly constituted man and woman should have clear ideas about money and know his own position. "In these days," I continued, "a spendthrift is a criminal and a miser worse," and I gave a little lecture on social economics. She regarded me quizzically, she wasn't interested in the general topic. "It's only people that matter," she said, which wasn't quite logical after her questionings, and I said, rather acidly, that the reality of your care for people could be tested by your attitude to economics. "That's true, no doubt," she said, and I was slightly disconcerted as when one pushes overmuch at the open door. We

seemed far from any point, and I studied her, puzzled and groping for sympathies. Then "What is it?" I cried.

But it was nothing. Nothing at all. My apprehensions were of the vaguest, for when I faced possibilities I felt sure that Antony or Marmaduke had gone farther in my imaginings than in hers. And I wouldn't let my apprehensions form. She left me, and I didn't try to detain her.

And in my heart I knew that I must lose her, that already, it might be, I didn't stand first with her. Was it a mere vanity? I am only a father with the rest, and a time comes when we are thwarted and starved. We are capable of a passion and the time of mating is over. As Meredith said, "His heart held cravings for the buried day." Well, I wanted to know the worst. I wanted to know if the day was really buried. I set down here the things one doesn't set down. They are, as the critics say, "morbid," a word that is as good for evading the issues as "magnetism." Logically all this is absurd. I am no fool. I front the world, as we all front the world, in an attitude charmingly correct. Some day I should "give away" Helen, and I should be properly garbed in a black coat and carrying a top-hat—unless indeed a genteel grey had become fashionable again. I should clap the bridegroom on the back and call him "My dear boy," I should laugh like a lunatic when rice and the old slipper were thrown.

Helen and I couldn't talk together of these things We were getting to an artificial state, and we feared

to draw simple inferences. She was at an age when a girl can't be open. If her mother had lived I might have been learning things about her, I might have got to know her better. She is a woman and can't talk to me. She looks so beautifully frank and simple, but it's a placid mask. Life in its alarming strangeness, its intricacy, crowds upon her, and her joy of life is amazingly brave. I would help her, but I'm a stick, a stone, a mere figure. I suppose that presently I shall become a difficulty to her, an incalculable circumstance. I do her wrong. Must you, to be honest in the record, put down every misgiving? The truth about a man is the best he can say for himself. A brave front is the thing.

We had invited Marmaduke to join us in a summer holiday, and as his fortnight was fixed for July we accepted that sweltering month. After hesitating between Eskdale and Patterdale, we managed to get lodgings in a little house in Hartsop. Those of civilized habit who take to holiday lodgings ask themselves why they and their kind continue to endure the squalor and inconvenience of such places. Most of them are totally unsuitable for the purposes to which they are put, but they give an air of improvisation which is a precious part of the holiday spirit. And, incredibly, when you feel that you are suffering the unique experience, you discover that exquisite friends too, men of the world and fine ladies, are struggling with rice pudding and kippers and jam from the pot, with a minimum of towels and taps and knives, with the decorations of the lowly British

home. We took it all with a frolic welcome; when it was fine we went out, and when it was wet we achieved a kind of social unity in disputation. We even read a little, and literary composition went on sketchily in my bedroom. Of course we made excursions—to High Street and Helvellyn and Place Fell. The ascent by Striding Edge was the limit of adventure, and over this Randal shed his subdued irony. He affected to find Striding Edge early Victorian, and perhaps he was a little too ready to explain that real climbing was quite another matter. But Randal and I were the two genuine Wordsworthians; critical or sceptical comments came from Marmaduke and Helen. She was reading Dorothy Wordsworth's diary, and it fascinated her. It was beautiful, she agreed, but it was incredible. She said to Randal: "Is this early Victorian too?"

He frowned. "No," he said. "It belongs to the ages."

"Do you mean," she said, "that I might be to you as Dorothy to William?"

"Yes," he said; "or I to you."

"You make that concession to modern woman?" I said.

"There'll never be another Boswell," cried Marmaduke.

"I should have thought they were all over the place," Randal said with extreme gravity, but he didn't respond to cries of "Name!"

Helen agreed rather tamely that Dorothy ministering to her genius of a brother was a bigger thing

than Dorothy in any conceivable independence. "And," she said boldly, "devotion to a brother"—she looked at me and faltered—"a brother—is—may be a finer thing than to a husband."

I glanced at Marmaduke and he muttered nervously, "Oh! I say!" I didn't think he meant anything in particular by it. The wise Randal came in with a pronouncement on the changing spirit of the time. "It's true enough," he said, "that the modern brother couldn't rest quite easy under a sister's devotion. He would keep saying to himself: Can she do better? It never would occur to Wordsworth that Dorothy could do better."

"There was only needlework and dusting the drawing-room in those days," Helen said.

"Exactly," said Randal, "but now——"

"There was always marriage," I said.

"And there are lots of modern tyrants," said Marmaduke; "fellows who grind their women to servitude."

"We're talking about enlightened people," said Randal, "not Hottentots. I don't say the young poets aren't egoists, but they do things in a different way."

We got among vague generalities, skirting the particular sometimes, but never coming to anything dangerous. Randal and I agreed quite nicely that the woman must throw over her parents on the deep instinct for a husband, and we wouldn't permit Helen any sentimental reservation. I was a little afraid of Randal's clever logic and apt to curry favour with him by anticipating his point of view. I thought that

some day he might reproach me with being a sentimentalist.

I had been staggered when Helen proposed that Marmaduke should come with us, but it was obviously the decent thing to ask him, and I told myself that the proposal clearly showed he was not more than her friend. When he came he threw off care; he was charming, and we all liked him. Helen mended his clothes, Randal lent him things, for he was wretchedly equipped; but at Hartsop it didn't matter. He was superior to clothes; such outward things dwelt not in his desire, and he was admirably superior to first-class hotels as a genuine aristocrat should be. On the other hand, he seemed to require a valet, and we all tried to make up for one to him, wondering how he managed at home. He was the spoilt child of the party, and our pleasantries and chidings accorded queerly with instinctive deference to his intellectual standing. I could never get to the heart of him; I was curious to know whether he was good or bad, and he didn't let it out. Perhaps he didn't know, and his reticence was a kind of indecision.

We got newspapers, and in them we followed the fortunes of Antony. He was playing in lawn tennis tournaments in the north and getting on rather well. Then we saw that, mysteriously, he had scratched in a third round, and Marmaduke said suspiciously: "Does he know that you're here?" That was it, for Randal had given him friendly indications. He turned up at the Ullswater Hotel, and though Marmaduke's grin of welcome may have had its rueful element,

we were glad to see him. It made things less simple; it strung us up a bit. Capital fellow as Antony was, it seemed that he didn't easily get the pitch. However, he was ready to lead the laughter if not the talk, and he brought the diversion of lawn tennis gossip. He came only for a week-end, as he had other tennis engagements to fulfil. "But why don't you chuck 'em?" said Marmaduke incredulously, and I wondered whether this was extorted against his interests. Antony explained that he had been able to get away from the last meeting because he was out of everything except the singles, but that now he had partners to consider. "You wouldn't come, you know," he said, turning to Helen. "Solid character, isn't he?" said Marmaduke. "A bulwark of what d'ye call 'em." There was, as Randal said, a certain grandeur about Antony. He liked his hotel to be first class, and even in Manchester he preferred to have his tea at the right place. Marmaduke told him he was bourgeois, but Randal defended him on the plea that there was a mighty rhythm of propriety in his life. But at the worst he took things smilingly, and he didn't want to flourish alone. He was benignant to Helen; seeing them together again I felt powerless in the grasp of Nature. Marmaduke's wit became unexpectedly bitter and shrill.

We returned home sooner than we had intended, and the cause—to be distinguished from the reason—was, I believe—nay, I am sure—that Marmaduke had to go, and we couldn't bear the idea of his facing

Manchester alone. It doesn't seem quite sane; it was sentimental, perhaps. It's a world in which you mustn't be too pitiful, and pity for the man of the world may be an infernal impertinence. The point is, I suppose, that Marmaduke wasn't a man of the world, and so it was possible to have feelings for him as well as attitudes towards him. I didn't want to go; Randal protested and consented; Helen hadn't much to say. I was sensitive to her wishes, and we went. I had been looking forward to what Randal called concentrated family, and I did a little hinting on the lines of reason in ruthlessness. "How can you be too pitiful?" cried Helen, and paused for a reply. So I went on savagely, grossly, implacably, to recall or to realize suffering, miseries, horrors, all over the world. They are never-ending, impossible to end. Children are being hurt, old people left desolate, strong men struck down. If it's in the next room or the next street you bend your energies to relieve; if it's round the corner you don't bother. If you have a vote, of course you give it to the side likely to put things right; when a world's catastrophe compels a subscription list you send your guinea or, maybe, two. Would you give away all but bare subsistence whenever there's want in the world? Must we all devote our lives to work of relief?

"And why not?" said Helen.

"Ah!" I said, "we've to keep joy, gaiety, art, beauty in the world. Yes, and comfort, jollity, profusion. It may be a sufficient life to devote yourself

to these. The drones, the wretched and unfortunate, must die. It's the finest things in the world that must be preserved."

"Yes; things like pity," she said. And then she added: "You do talk some rubbish, Daddy."

Yet she was perturbed. She told me how nurses in hospitals threw off their preoccupations and were merry together. And the great, devoted women of history had not been unhappy. They had lived amid suffering, they were not callous, they could feel and bear much. As to mere jolliness, she didn't know if that was much good. We might be meant for sorrow.

"And get to like it?" I said.

"To live in it. To be of it."

"To have sorrowful children?"

"I talk nonsense too," she said.

But I persisted that there must be some hardening of the heart. We must be sportsmanlike, we must recognize the principle of the turn, the share; but we mustn't go about seeking for the pitiable, trying to induce people to be pitiable. Indeed, I dreaded the time when my communion with her should sink to the minor key. I wanted her joyful admiration, her pride and confidence. I wasn't in a decline, I had happy years to live; a very small infusion of pity was all I required, but she had so much to spare. I could be sarcastic about it, I could see it as comic. These modern young people are comedians. Frank young creatures with the lust of life in them will tell you that anything after forty is a living death, and you

have been cherishing the notion that at sixty you are as young as your father was at forty. Life is not all change and loss. I would not have love to come to my brave, handsome girl in sorrow and pity. Our merriments together became spasmodic. I couldn't trust her to be happy. Sometimes I withdrew from her in sullenness. It recalled the old days when she was a very little girl and was sulky with me. And then —God forgive me!—I was sulky with her and very unhappy.

Chapter 10

RANDAL came to me in distress. The philosophical Randal had tears in his voice and something like distraction in 's aspect. He was a boy again, wanting his father, and it was bitter-sweet to me. He was the friend of both parties, of all parties, and he assured me that the outsider sees most of the game; his emotion positively let that platitude through. He told me what I had seen, inferred, dreaded. The poor boy was anxious about his sister. Helen and Antony, you might say, loved one another. They did. It was normal, obvious, the right thing, the way of the world. Nay, it was capital, joyful, beautiful (he gave me my own reflections). They matched, they were mates, they suggested a magnificent symmetry. And then, athwart all this, comes Marmaduke.

It was a queer position for me, for I was thrust into the part of Marmaduke's advocate. I was impelled to say, "Well, what's wrong with Marmaduke?" knowing very well that a good deal was wrong with him. I think I had some dim, childish notion that Marmaduke and Antony might somehow cancel out and leave us happy and free. It was a feeling, a pseudo-aspiration. "He's your friend," I went on.

"Yes," said Randal, "he's my friend."

His emotion had told me much, but I saw him cool-

ing to articulation, to subtleties that might confuse the issue. "In friendship one takes chances," he said.

"And in love?" I said.

I was on his side, I was with him in the way he was going, but I must oppose him.

"Confound the fellow!" said Randal, recapturing his man-of-the-world air. "I never thought he had a look in. I knew he amused her, and I resented it when she took him too lightly. Yes, Daddy, he's my friend, and I'm not ashamed of that. But for Helen —I can't be sure of him. He's incalculable; he isn't safe. Antony's the man for her. It's this infernal feminine contrariness."

"And where are they, then? What's the position?" I said.

It appeared that nothing was definite. So Randal continued with intelligent comments on the modern woman who is not all for the commanding figure, the conqueror, the tender bully; she wants to be in things at first-hand herself. I suggested that the conquering Antony deposed would become pathetic and might have a chance on the rebound. Randal wagged his wise young head, muttering about modern twists. In place of the joy of the hunting morning, we are all sympathy for the fox. We are getting too spiritual, he declared. He was talking from the head, hardly even from the mood. Coming down to common sense he said, "Where's he to get an income?" and he added that all the logic was on Antony's side. "Then let logic do its work," I said. "Don't hurry things. Wait and see."

Shrewdly, sententiously, Randal said: "When you reach a certain pressure of agitation something has got to be done; some decision must be made." And, indeed, it's true that too many young people let the moment pass and eat their hearts out in reserve and indecision. It's easy to torture yourself till you cling to the torture habit. Perhaps such anticipations were not strictly relevant. I wanted to be alone; I couldn't think freely with Randal there, and I had become guarded and artificial. He regained simplicity. He said: "I can't bear to think of her unhappy with that fellow." It astonished me as the display of your own mind through another medium does. He was really very much affected. Here was I making an enormous fuss about my relations with Helen, unique and so beautiful, and now it appeared that Randal's simple affection, his commiseration, his eagerness to help, put him at least on my level. He could throw over Marmaduke in a moment, and yet he was staunch, he would never desert Marmaduke.

And presently Helen came to me with an extraordinary proposal. It was, in effect, that I should adopt Marmaduke, that he should come to live with us. She said she wanted him for a brother; she met my eye calmly, unblushingly, as she made this remarkable statement. I was staggered, but I've the habit of trying not to dismiss surprising proposals too lightly; I've always thought the parental no-thoroughfares deficient in magnanimity. So I didn't shout or wave my arms about, though I had an impulse of sympathy for the tyrannical Victorian fathers. Helen said that

she had mentioned it to Randal, and that he was willing—at least, he was not unwilling. I asked what Randal had said, and it appeared that he considered it "was not a solution," but that anything was better than letting Marmaduke collapse. "Solution of what?" I said. She had the impudence to say "Of the difficulty," and I felt that it would be unworthy to continue with "What difficulty?"

I declined any ceremony of adoption, but I said I was willing for Marmaduke to make a prolonged, even an indefinite, stay. I thought that this was best, though for me it wasn't a happy best. Randal, who had gone back to Oxford, wrote a letter which my humour interpreted as a congratulation upon my liberality. Evidently it cheered him to find the older generation capable of innovation, or, at any rate, of accepting it. He wasn't easy about the arrangement, but it was a resolute grasping of the nettle and so appealed to him. He assured me that Marmaduke was "extremely adaptable," to which I replied by asking if he meant "slippery rascal." Of course, this was only verbal pleasantry; the prospect of Marmaduke was at least interesting. Continuing the policy of nettle-grasping, I told Helen to invite him. I don't know what she said, but he declined. I was curious about his letter, but she didn't show it, and I was left to surmise pride, reserve, arrogance, delicacy, common sense. I was anxious, for Helen had retired into her own fastnesses, her inscrutable mood, and I didn't know what would happen next. She was gentle with me and kind and even playful, but I didn't know her. She was mys-

terious, and I assured myself that love is founded on mystery; you go a little way and the infinitely inscrutable lures you; know everything, even penetrate to the positive essential, and all is over. But I was Helen's father and she was unhappy. I must do something, so I wrote to him. In reply I received a queer rigmarole. I suspected him of being drunk when he wrote it. He wasn't a drunkard, I was sure, but I had seen him drink rather recklessly.

I read the letter by inferences, and I think he didn't want to be overloaded with pity, especially with Helen's pity. I think, too, there was a small, furtive reason against his coming in the poor boy's vanity. He didn't seem to care about the shocking state of his wardrobe when we were at Hartsop, but it might be taken as part of the fun there; naturally he didn't like to come to us as a mendicant. There was a burst of arrogance in the letter: "You think me weak. Which of you has endured like me?" It was startling.

I showed the letter to Helen and she was angry with me. "You want to damage him with me," she said. "You are not generous."

I gazed at her and she corrected this miserably, ridiculously into: "You are less generous than usual."

I didn't know what to say, and I feared to make some smart, irritating point. Dejectedly she went on: "Didn't you want me to see how wrong he could be? Didn't you want to choke me off?"

I said: "I would tell you everything I knew about him, good or bad."

She considered that and then she said: "I haven't been fair to you."

It was a cool, reasonable concession. Sympathy, emotion, welled up in me, and she would put me off with reasonable concessions. A kiss on the brow or some such frigidity would have been a suitable punctuation. She wasn't fair to me. And I wrote again to Marmaduke, begging him to come. I sat long over the letter, weighing phrases and concocting expressions of sympathy and even of admiration. I was really very "nice" to him. He replied to say that he would think it over; the letter contained what are called suitable acknowledgments, but there was some gratitude in a postscript. I offered to show Helen the letter, but she shook her head.

For the time we left it at that and went on with our lives, with our business and desires, "such as they are," as Hamlet says. I wanted to know where she stood; I was intensely curious. I should have liked a long and intimate conversation about Antony and Marmaduke with beautiful, frank, girlish confessions, and I felt capable of a wonderful magnanimity. We were friendly and gentle together, and yet I couldn't say a word about it. All our intimacy and affection seemed to be irrelevant. She was terribly sensitive, and if I cleared my throat she stiffened to the defensive. I imagine that her mind was in confusion, her feelings obscure, her egoism fiercely combatant. I couldn't have got the truth out of her, for there was no coherent truth. I believe now that her nature was

struggling to noble issues, that this wasn't just a perverse mood. But we fell apart; we retained our tender courtesies, hoping for something more.

And, after all, Helen wasn't everything to me. There was Randal, too, but my children were not all. I am a literary man; I am an artist; I have my resources. I found myself ranging resources against her. I have the queer old habit—and perhaps most of us have it—of Castles in the Air, Castles in Spain. When I can't sleep at nights, I set off to incredible adventures. When I was a boy I made my hundreds in big cricket matches, I led forlorn hopes. And now I sometimes go on, from night to night, pursuing the same episode and not a very subtle one. I keep to the boyishness of it. I make Helen my heroine, and I indulge in debauches of sentiment. I die for her, I sacrifice for her; and though it has occurred to me that all this is very like David Copperfield and the elder Miss Larkins, I go on with it. Helen is the splendid figure, but there are times when it comes to me with a shock that she is just an ordinary girl, that she isn't looking beautiful, that she isn't doing anything that matters, that the world is a dull place. And then some movement, some word, a quickening within myself; she is graceful or significant or lucky, and my idealism soars up again. There is steady affection to reinforce it, of course. I am sceptical about their Beatrices and Lauras, mere emanations from the poets. I have my daughter, Helen.

Yes, but I have my resources, and even day-dreams might take me far from her. I have impulses, habits,

deep prepossessions that she can't share, can't comprehend. We've gone to the theatre together, but her appreciations are wayward, accidental. They don't chime with mine; she's interesting sometimes, but unordered. I strive towards order with her, but it's a mad quest. It's like trying to get order into our queer, fascinating old world. Success, in either case, would be disastrous failure, but we have to work for it; our moral nature becomes a ruthless machine. But when things that move me don't touch her, I feel that there's something wrong, something that ought to be put right.

I have my resources. I've no craving for the life of the actor, but I've the habit of acting in the mind. I pace the lawn on a sunny day, and the mighty rhythm of Othello's speeches possesses me. Rarely do I articulate, and when I do it's experimental, broken. But in the mind the passionate sonorities roll magnificently.

"Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content,"

it goes, and then I have Iago by the throat and hurl those tremendous speeches at him. But I pause—

"I slept the next night well, fed well, was free and merry"

for a great line will sometimes possess my mind so that I can't get past it, but repeat it again and again. And "free and merry," I say, "free and merry," and ponder the phrase. It does not become less astonishing, and I can continue to invest it with shades of

meaning and emotion. I can even trail about the stage crying "Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" I can repeat "She's like a liar, gone to burning hell: 'twas I that killed her," and the beauty of it is so poignant that it is hardly bearable.

I can feel the frenzy of an exalted poetical diction. What a respite from the world! What a relief! Helen has filled me with emotion, and this expression of emotion relieves me. But she can't share it; she can't understand. I saw her lean from a window, and "Whatever are you doing?" she says, for I had been waving my stick and my arms. I tell her in guarded form, and she says: "Queer old Daddy." I kiss my hand to her and it makes me happy. I am timid with her; I am shy. I am very shy sometimes, and I am afraid of boring her with my preferences or enthusiasms. She has wonderful capacities, and I don't give her a chance. I tell myself that it's useless to talk to her about Wordsworth. She can't see anything but childishness in "We are Seven." Some lines of the great ode stirred her, but I dare say a commoner, grandiose thing would have done as well. When, once, I read "The Leech Gatherer" to her I compelled her attention, and "You make me feel it," she said. That was a triumph, but I couldn't make steady progress with her. The "Ode to Duty" puzzled her.

She was preoccupied. Realities pressed upon her; adolescence, with its terrors and shy awakenings, was not far behind her, and now shapes grew more definite, apprehensions took form. Yes, I suppose I am mor-

bid; I make too much of it all. The casual, good-natured, ordinary parental relation is the best. I have a calm, steady affection for Randal, as I suppose he has for me. Helen's for me is, I suppose, more like a fitful pulsation, but mine for her is an excess, it is fanatical; you can cultivate your passions, you can connive at their growth. And now this passion had become more one-sided than ever. She was passing away from me; she was under an influence that must be stronger than mine. Her mother had talked to her of marriage as a sacrament, and she couldn't associate the idea of it with pure joy. Randal and I were ready to plump for Antony, but he was fading out of the picture. We were both agitated, we were even exasperated against the insidious Marmaduke. We were a little exasperated with Antony too. I didn't know exactly what had occurred between him and Helen, but there seemed to be something fatuous in his sad acquiescence, his magnanimity. The gentle giant was ready to be the friend of every one, and we felt that he ought to have fought the case. It happened that I met him in the Manchester streets, when I was thinking of him in terms of Helen, and I stopped him. The traffic surged round us, and I questioned him. I think I said: "Look here! What's the meaning of all this?" He didn't pretend not to understand. We were in Cross Street, and he took my arm and led me into the comparative quiet of King Street. He did it very kindly and very much as an elder brother would have done it. We paced slowly up that highly respectable thoroughfare arm-in-arm.

"Now, what d'you want to know?" he said.

The blunt word has always been one of my affectations. I said: "I want to know why you are not to be my son-in-law."

"There's nothing I should like better."

"Yet you submit?"

"Do you want me to make a row?" he said. "I've no grievance. Helen has been very kind to me. We've talked it over a good deal. I think she's wrong, of course; I think she'd far better marry me. You never know—it isn't that I'm not good enough, she says. Indeed, she goes on saying that I'm too good. I'm too flourishing. It's quite absurd. She seems to think that you can be too happy—that I—I've thought of going out and smashing something. I thought she liked me—loved me, you know. Marmaduke Abney's a cleverer chap, of course, but I don't think it's that. If I were a broken-down ruffian I might have a chance. I can't pretend to be what I'm not."

He was a moderate, likeable fellow. I couldn't reproach him for keeping within his nature. I couldn't even despise him for lacking passion, though I thought how tremendously I would have swept aside Helen's flimsy subterfuges if I had been in his place and with his advantages. He would make a good faithful-dog kind of lover. Perhaps, after all, Marmaduke was more worthy of Helen. Neither of them would drink up eisel nor eat a crocodile, but I could imagine Marmaduke doing something desperate. Antony would never be desperate. To the worst that fortune could do, to disaster, to impending destruction he would pre-

sent a brave front. I found that I had a great affection for him. We parted with friendliness, and I watched him swing down King Street like a man without a care. It would have been less touching to see him crawl away in dejection. His gallant aspect expressed a kind of humility; who was he to complain? And "Damn your humility," I said, looking after him.

Chapter II

I was constrained to play my last card; I proposed delay. I found it difficult to get Helen to talk about it. She might have feared my rough touch. I don't think she was ever a devout Christian, but she was sensitive in anything relating to her mother, and she had somehow persuaded herself that her mother would approve of her marriage. I might have been interfering with a religious rite, and I, on my part, ridiculously, found her lacking in intellectual honesty. And, of course, she was; she moved by intuitions, impulses; it was useless to look for logical justification.

So I talked to Marmaduke, and not unkindly, I hope. "I know you're not mercenary, my boy," I said, "but I don't see what your financial scheme is. You can barely support yourself, and I don't see how you can take on Helen."

He looked blank. "She says she has some money," he said.

I explained that she hadn't. "She's now nineteen," I said, "and she hasn't any income till she's twenty-five. It is true that I could let her have this income if I approved of her marriage, but then, you know, I don't. At present, I don't."

"Yes, I know," he said, "but she's quite sure that —well—I mean t' say—she thinks you'll come round."

"I shall have to come round in about six years."

"But, my dear sir," he cried in dismay, "we may all be under the sod."

I said: "If I'm under the sod I shall be succeeded by trustees, who have no option at all. It'll have to be six years."

"No good in murdering you, then," he said.

We were both good-tempered over it, but we didn't agree. The virtue of delay didn't appeal to him at all. It was contrary to his philosophy. I suggested that he would naturally wish to prepare a place, to obtain a position, to strengthen his hold on the world before embarking on matrimony. I'm afraid I used that phrase, and it gave him a kind of opening. "Isn't this rather conventional?" he said. I agreed, but maintained that conventions in moderation were necessary; we couldn't go on initiating and improvising all the time; no nerves or constitution would stand it. Rather gloomily he said: "Better take me as I am."

We did not go very deep, but we skirted the subject of his possible future. He knew himself too well. He had none of the hopeful illusions of the industrious apprentice. He disliked the idea of the future, and that notion of serving seven years for Rachel filled him with dismay. My heart sank to think of this as my Helen's husband. Where would he be in the course of the years? We must all face the ultimate collapse, but most of us are upheld by intervening ambitions. Marmaduke hadn't ambitions, and to him the future was an obscurity of disaster. So I made it out. He lived in the present. He wanted to marry Helen, and

if she could get that income it would be immediately practicable. He was not really extravagant; he had fairly simple tastes, though he was capable of expansions. A little house with Helen in it must be infinitely attractive beside those frowsy lodgings. And: Here I am! he might say. I am at my best. I am not a bad fellow. I am a man of family. (He wouldn't say that, but it was in his mind.) I am worth while to any girl that's any good. And doubtless, in his way, which wouldn't be the high Victorian way, he idealized his love for Helen as, doubtless, she idealized hers for him. And certainly he was, as we say in these days, amusing. He wasn't negligible. I think Helen had the idea that I ought to applaud her choice of an intellectual (though, by the by, he wasn't precisely that), and she might have been ready to congratulate me on missing poor, dull old Antony as a son-in-law. She could be roused to something near that, though Antony, I'm sure, remained to her a benignant figure and, I think, even disconcertingly pitiable.

Between intelligent people the straight talk hasn't much virtue. They know all there is to say, and to project the words at one another may roughen up the nerves without touching the reason. Yet I felt that Helen and I must make some attempt at an understanding, that in this case all wasn't so simple. So I put the seemingly simple question to her: Why would she marry?

We paced the lawn together, and it struck me that it would be more difficult to get her into a corner here than in a room. We did, indeed, interrupt ourselves

sometimes to point out a plant or to remark that the south-west wind had cleared the air, and given us the long ridge of Kinder Scout again. Such interruptions were friendly in intention, devised to take the edge off any gathering hostility. For I suppose there was hostility. Love doesn't imply agreement, but disagreement can't exist along with love. Why would she marry? Why did anyone marry? I meant, why should she marry Marmaduke?

I did mean that. She asked what I had against him, and I said: "Nothing, but what's in your own mind." This was rather neat, but there isn't much good in being neat in such a case. She said, "Then there's nothing," with an air of finality. Of course that wouldn't do for me. Then she said: "Surely, Daddy, this is my business, not yours."

I said: "If it's business we're talking, the point is this: Marmaduke can't support you. By your mother's arrangement I've control of your money. The arrangement was made for such a case as this. I think he's not a suitable husband. He has to show that he is capable of becoming one. It's for him to make the effort. If he doesn't or can't, he's unworthy, he's despicable."

Impatiently she said: "That sounds well, of course. If you take the ordinary worldly view, Marmaduke won't do at all. But, don't you see—there's nobody like him. He's—well, he's Marmaduke."

That was it. She didn't claim for him moral qualities or social or any kind except the supreme quality of being Marmaduke. And I couldn't analyse their rela-

tion; I could only surmise and infer and probe round dejectedly. Poor girl! She looked at me with incredulous eyes. She found herself against something hard in me. I was the obstinate parent, after all. I kept thinking in her favour. If she was for Marmaduke, I didn't want her to be slack in it. A big tragic figure is better than a little, uncomfortable one. Perhaps it was better to come to smash than to meander on in ignoble dullness, semi-comfort. And, besides, Marmaduke mustn't be regarded as simply a bad hat. The Victorian parent in me estimated the youngster as selfish and irresponsible. My objection to Marmaduke would appeal to any rational parent; I was supported by the wisdom of the ages, and yet I've always been disposed to a sceptical discounting of that wisdom.

We went on pacing the lawn, but she had dropped her hand from my arm. I wondered if she could conceive how miserable I was. I looked upon sky and trees and the distant hills, and it flitted through my mind that as solace the power of these was much exaggerated. She began to speak again.

"Of course," she said, "I might have an easier time by marrying some one else. I know you've thought of Antony, and—well, he would have been willing."

I laughed a little here. I must have my poor little jokes. She looked at the landscape severely. "I beg your pardon," I said.

"I like Antony very much," she continued. "There was a time when I could have believed that I loved him. But now—and you—you've always preached to me

('Preached,' I muttered) against the easy and the luxurious, the way of least resistance. Marmaduke may lead me a hard life? Very well. But you don't know him. You don't understand. He's not your conventional, easy-going, competent young man of the world. You don't mean to say you think more of Antony than of Marmaduke?" And then she added, in a little comic interlude of commiseration, "Poor Antony!"

"I should prefer him for a son-in-law," I said. I don't know why I said it. She roused my antagonism. Great heaven! My antagonism! And I felt for Antony. I was getting enmeshed in feelings. If Helen was determined to marry Marmaduke I couldn't stop her, but reason was against it. Yes, and Randal was against it. I didn't want to stress this, for it wasn't fair to use him just to bolster my case; doubtless he had his own point of view. It was all a question of Marmaduke's character, and if her mind was made up it would be a horrible thing, a disastrous start to blacken it to her. Besides, as I had said, I knew no more than she did. And I had to put it to myself whether deeply, subconsciously, my opposition was not very much that old jealousy. I thought I had schooled myself to yield gracefully, but even now I hated that anyone should take my girl from me. Yet if she yielded and remained unwillingly with me, I had lost her. I had lost her, anyway.

It might have been telepathy that led to her cutting across my meditation with: "You can't expect to keep me all the time." Perhaps it was only shrewdness.

And, doubtless, the cause of all the trouble was just the spring of the young blood. After all, these young people were lovers. The world has agreed that love bloweth where it listeth; the old sentimental world has always believed in love philtres. I thought I knew better, I thought that diagnosis was applicable even here; yet I had thought that Antony was inevitable. It was her queer whim to qualify the simple burgeoning of youth; she wanted something of her very own; she preferred the crabbed Marmaduke to the resplendent Antony. And perhaps her confused mind—which could prompt such clear, decisive action—conceived Marmaduke sometimes as a brand to be plucked from the burning. He was an attractive kind of sinner, and are we not told that a woman loves a rake? It was never precisely true, but women do not love plaster saints. Antony wasn't that, but to Helen Marmaduke was the more romantic; the more intriguing figure. Possibly she would regard it as a holy office to mother him, and though romance and mothering make a queer combination, Helen had always a turn for mixing things. Marmaduke had the greater need; I used to think that choice of Candida's at the end of the play was fudge, but perhaps there's something in it, or there would have been if it had been at the beginning instead of the end. I try to see Helen's choice as possible, which it must have been as it was made. My bogglings were not all selfishness; I wanted high, straightforward ecstasy for her.

Of course she was too shrewd to say she wanted to marry Marmaduke because she pitied him; she was

capable of immolating herself, but she would do it unobtrusively. I didn't press my points; I had to lie on whatever bed I made for myself.

So we came back to business again. She was very calm about it. There was no difficulty. In a matter of this kind it was impossible that we should disagree. She relied absolutely on my sense of justice. I couldn't help interpolating: "And your mother's."

"Let's not bring my mother in," she said. "I suppose she took somebody's advice or did the usual thing, or wanted to pay you a compliment. I am as capable of choice as I ever shall be. I am going to marry, and I need the money. Why! It wouldn't be honest to keep it from me."

"Pardon me!" I said. "It would be perfectly honest. I should get no benefit from it."

"It wouldn't be just." She added: "And you are just."

We took another turn along the lawn and back again. "If I gave way, would you go on paying me compliments?" I said. So it ended in laughter and—thank God—not bitter laughter. But she didn't know how unhappy I was.

I think I can accept the inevitable as well as most people, but here it seemed that there might be, after all, a way out. I felt the hopelessness of active interference, of attempts at direction and control, and yet I felt, too, that with these wayward, incalculable young people mere accident might prevail; they were such a mixture of instinct, reason and the romantic conventions. And I wasn't much better myself. Was I in

the position of one who would separate Paola and Francesca or Romeo and Juliet? Were my cares and precautions those of a huckster or of a precisian? I seemed to know amazingly little about Marmaduke, and, again, I could have sworn I knew him thoroughly.

One afternoon at the Sports Club I saw him and Antony side by side in deck-chairs, and they were talking together earnestly. Antony seemed to be voluble for once, and my instinct told me that nothing but Helen could bring such a tension between them. I was to learn later that they had discussed whether Antony should be the best man when Helen and Marmaduke married. But the discussion was not confined to that.

Presently Antony went away, with a friendly touch on Marmaduke's shoulder. I joined him. We sat facing an empty tennis-court; a set was over, another had not been formed. He told me that Antony had been giving him a tremendous lecture on the duties and responsibilities of married life. My heart sank; they had got as far as that! I was ready to resent any facetious handling of the subject, but Marmaduke said: "He's a great fellow—Antony. I'm a wretched little squirt beside him. I see your point."

"You see what isn't there, I fancy," said I.

"You are too generous to formulate it," he said; "or too discreet."

I thought: What a curious modification! This fellow will be interesting at least.

We sat silent awhile, and then I perceived Helen coming toward us. I glanced at Marmaduke and he was watching her with an eager fixity. I was startled

to see tears in his eyes. Were they signs of weakness or of strength? She sat down with us, and it came to me that I had never seen them together as I saw them now, and that it was all very serious and out of my control. I turned from one to the other in anxious curiosity. Looking at Helen, I could almost conceive a maternal relation. They spoke together, disregarding me, but I think Helen was managing us. I had to learn things; I had to be taken a little further. She said to Marmaduke: "Will Antony?"

"He will if you want it," Marmaduke said.

"I do want it," she said. "It will be best for him." And then she added: "There's no silly tragedy about Antony. He feels it that I won't marry him. He feels it simply. There's nothing dark and sinister in him. What would you do, in a like case, Marmy? You wouldn't behave so well."

She seemed to be studying him. He was frowning and fidgeting. With a certain ruthlessness she continued: "Antony would go on faithfully for ever." And then she looked at me. She was ready to experiment, to probe, to face anything that must be faced. She turned to him again and he muttered: "Don't torture me."

She said: "He loves me more now than Antony ever could."

"Now!" he cried. "Oh, yes, I'm unstable. I get through things. That's what she means. Be safe. Take your Antony."

She said: "Marmaduke is necessary to me now. I can't go back to what's safe and happy."

In my ignoble egoism I felt that I had lost her and I said to Marmaduke brutally: "Why, man! She pities you."

"Why not?" he said, but he was pale and trembling. "I am pitiable. She pities every one. She pities you. But I'm more than pitiable. She's mine."

"That's it," said Helen.

"Can you keep it at this pitch?" I said. "Are you faithful?"

Marmaduke said: "I am here and now. I know nothing of the future."

She said: "I take the risk."

I knew that it was over. My mind said to me: They are fine creatures, both. This is adequate. I shall get outside this and appreciate it. But I felt wronged and desolate. I was forsaken and cast off. We said no more then. Some people came to the vacant tennis-court in front of us. They eyed us curiously. I got up and went away, leaving Helen and Marmaduke to watch the game. I touched Marmaduke on the shoulder as Antony had done, and he looked at me with startled eyes. I think he was grateful. I encountered friends, and they were in the nod and wink stage of understanding about Helen and Marmaduke. I simulated, drearily enough, a jocosity of discretion.

When Helen and I went down the hill she took my arm and we walked in silence for a time. Then she said: "My happy days are past."

"You mustn't say that," I said. "That's not loyal."

"Yes it is," she said, and then: "I want to live my life with you over and over."

"You shall," I said, but I knew this was merely carrying on the conversation.

"I can't," she said. "It's past." And I knew that it was past.

Chapter 12

MARMADUKE, of course, is the villain of the piece, and not so much of a villain either. In my old-fashioned way I may put it that he lacked principle. He took no thought for the morrow and, though one agrees that it is easy to take too much, you must take some. Those who don't, force others to do it for them, and they are anything down to mean brutes. Marmaduke wasn't exactly a spendthrift, but he was capable of easy, genial expansions; he couldn't afford a club, but he joined one; moderate lodgings, such as ours at Hartsop, should have sufficed for their holidays, but he led the way to hotels as the easier line of resistance; circumstances would have excused high tea in the evenings, but he was accustomed to dine. And when Helen was not there he had a tendency to sponge. She had a conscience and didn't let him be extravagant at home, but—it is a wretched thing to record—he would make a little too free with other people's cigars and, generally, it seemed that his period of straitened circumstances had induced the habit of tucking in when he got the chance. He didn't try to borrow money from me, and I don't think Randal gave him much encouragement, but he took money from Antony. He would gaily compare himself with Harold Skimpole, the difference being, he said, that he didn't attempt to humbug anyone. He rubbed along

at his old work and appeared to be doing slightly better; he was far too indolent to force a change. He still managed to justify himself by entertaining his company. When he was at his best Helen would glance from one to the other of us quickly. Did we perceive? Did we appreciate? And, indeed, you can't harbour contempt for the man who holds his own and more in the verbal interchange. The solid, sullen virtues can't stand against that.

When Helen's children began to come I had to give definite help. Marmaduke agreed with easy graciousness, Helen without parade of gratitude, in simple acquiescence. Randal wanted me to make advances to her from his fortune, but I refused; I think he offered money saved from his allowance, but she wouldn't have that. It wasn't very comfortable. Helen was loyal to her husband, which meant that between us a great part of her life was unexplored. We were on affectionate terms. Oh, yes! Affectionate terms. We talked intimately sometimes, but it was always cautiously. We had all agreed to take Marmaduke as we found him, and I think he had some notion that as he entertained us it was only fair that we should pay. I wondered whether Helen considered him, weighed him. Was a blind acceptance possible? Was it possible that the romantic illusion persisted? He might have been everything that was great and good. I think that she saw everything and accepted it. She was too proud for excuses, and might even pretend to herself that it was all in the bargain. She worked like a horse. She suckled the children, nursed them,

brought them up. She fed them, she dosed them, amused them, punished them, played with them. She made their clothes and cut their hair. They came rapidly—three in three years—and yet she was hardly ever out of action. She had fine health, and so had her children. Apart from them she hardly had a day's holiday. And it might have been that she kept them as a guard about her. Who could think of her life as failure when they were there? She was a triumphant mother. When I played up to her as the triumphant grandfather we were happy together. I might shake my head in private over Marmaduke, but the children were all right. There was no decadence about them; Helen had enough vitality for two.

Marmaduke made quite a kind, jolly father. He possessed the virtues for which there was nothing to pay. If you were to put it to him that his child wanted a pair of boots he would doubtless put his hand into his pocket. If he drew it out empty the matter would go out of his mind. Of course if this illustration became a particular case he would disclaim responsibility. This was not his department but Helen's. At times I hated him from the bottom of my soul. Generally we got on very well.

I found it difficult to conceive their life together. In public she paid him a slightly exaggerated respect. The children, I could see, would be brought up in old-fashioned reverence for their father. It's no use. It's too late for that. The father must continually justify himself nowadays, while childish aberrations remain the indication of character and enterprise. (One had

these pettish reactions.) The mother has justified herself all the time. Helen kept her little house wonderfully and turned an orderly front to the world. Their financial affairs muddled on; they were beyond Helen's control. Marmaduke was still a man without a future. He was static; there were times when he seemed to be negligible. But he wasn't that.

Antony came to me in some distress. He said he had quarrelled with Marmaduke, which he hated to do, had sworn he never would do. It was about money, too. "But how the dickens," I said, "could you quarrel about money?" I had a notion, and it was, indeed, that he had at last objected to go on lending. His advances had become so regular that they amounted to a kind of annuity. It was a condition that Helen was not to know, and, of course, Antony's intention was to relieve the pressure upon her. But now it had become clear to Antony that Marmaduke was using the money to speculate with, and so, as he lost much more than he gained, there was no help to Helen at all. "And so I told him," said Antony, "that he must promise not to do this silly gambling with my money, and he said that a gentleman never asked another for a promise. It annoyed me, and I told him to go to blazes."

The good fellow was quite distressed at the idea that he was losing this means of unproductive expenditure. He was a quiet giver, and I was puzzled, at first, to know why he had told me about this. But "Mr. Daunt," he said, "you must stop him. I'm afraid, I'm sure, he's playing the fool. He wants

money, he's harassed—it's difficult for me to speak. He'll come back to me, he'll accept my terms; he'll promise, but he won't keep his promise. I'm sorry to say this."

"My dear fellow," I said, "you've earned the right to say anything you please. You're a man in a thousand. I'm ashamed, I'm moved—yes, and I'm proud—when I think of what you've lost and suffered and endured. You're a splendid figure, but I think of you sometimes as the man in a hair-shirt."

He looked astonished. I felt rather embarrassed myself. It was some satisfaction, though, to say what I thought about him. Somehow, we all took Antony for granted. He had every encouragement to be blatant, and the more imposing and grandiose he was, the more modest he became. And now, at my outburst, he stared and said: "Oh, as to that, I have a pretty good time."

A pretty good time. I suppose I was having one myself. It is something to grow old without coming to disaster, and there was nothing in my circumstances inconsistent with a pretty good time. It is true that Helen had not married to my liking, but I was a grandfather now and had a proper joy in the youngsters. I didn't even shudder when I saw a feature or an expression of Marmaduke's coming out; I didn't worry myself with thinking that his less admirable traits would be repeated in them. It may be a salutary reflection that if you have offspring at all you are likely, soon or late, to have your share in producing a slacker, a fool or a positive criminal. You cannot tie

up your money safely for ever and you cannot, even with the aid of eugenics and education, perpetuate your excellencies through the generations. Happily, the criminal, in his turn, cannot ensure that he will not produce the saint. And, in the economy of nature, a potential criminal may make a charming baby. Marmaduke could still be a capital companion, and one made a mistake in regarding him in relation to the ages and righteousness generally. He was the kind of person who brought things to grief, but we always feel that a shaky institution will last our time.

There comes a time when you want just rest and peace, but you mustn't let it come too soon. And here was I, an amateur of feelings and emotions, aiming to shape them into beauty, and yet wanting peace. They say that the old don't feel deeply, but when are you old? When is it time for the artist in tragedy to turn from his attempt to express great emotions and adopt the quiet chronicle, the quiet story? Grief makes channels that deepen with age, but grief at last becomes a ritual, and you may exercise your rite when feelings are dead. And love may settle into the ruts of affection. A time may come when life is not infinitely fresh and various, though you may hail it with clamorous pretences. Perhaps I should be grateful to Marmaduke for keeping me alive, but at the time I cursed him as heartily as the most conventional could wish. This was in private or with Randal and Antony; one couldn't beat the man himself when he was down, and with Helen it was a case for perpetual solicitude.

I was alarmed at what Antony had told me, and I went, the next evening, to the little house in the undistinguished Manchester suburb where Helen lived. The house had been taken—you could hardly say chosen—for want of something better within their means. It was in a terrace on a quiet road, and its architecture was of the Victorian kind which superimposed liveliness on dullness. But the interior of the house was beautiful, or, at least, it contained many beautiful things. Helen had fine taste and Marmaduke connoisseur's taste. It was astonishing to turn into the dingy little house and find there a beautiful home. I suppose that, by modern standards, Helen was something of a martinet with her children. They had large measures of freedom, but there was some standard of decorum which, if not rigid, was persistent. She toiled for them, and it was to some purpose. Randal and I regarded this house in Manchester as a temporary lodging, but we hadn't induced Helen to come to Darley, and Marmaduke was indolently attached to club life. I think Helen shrank from the taking up of threads of old Darley life.

And this little house of theirs wasn't a bad home to come back to. Marmaduke had had some happy times there, but he was out a good deal now. I suppose his wit and aptitudes made him a popular figure or a prominent one, and his habits had become very much those of a bachelor. There are two kinds of husbands—those who say where they have been and those who don't, and "the club" became representative or symbolic. You may get rest and ease at the

club, but the club habit doesn't always make for the spiritual life. Randal had said sadly that he had "lost joy" in Marmaduke; more acidly he had described him as "in danger of frisky middle-age." With Helen Marmaduke preserved the forms, and when I was with them there was, I think, an increased punctiliousness. I had thought his passion for Helen the noblest thing about him, but it had faded and shrunk; something of affection remained, for she looked after him and wasn't reproachful. And even now, with her children about her, I think he often possessed her mind. She was to him like a mother whose son is "a little wild" and may become wilder.

Beset with misgivings, I entered the house. The children were soon toddling and crowing about me, herded by Helen, and all was well. Not quite; I saw anxiety and questioning in her eyes.

Presently the maid came and took the children away. She was nurse and housemaid and everything and Helen's sworn friend and supporter. Helen was a worker who did not become a drudge, but time began to show its traces; her youth was crossed with endurance. We sat together looking at one another solicitously. She was in trouble, and that made her think of me anxiously, but her trouble was pressing. I said: "What is it?" and she replied: "It's bothering for you." I said: "Make the bother big enough. You know I'd do anything in the world for you."

"I take from you," she said. "I take. I never give."

"Why!" I cried, "among other things you've given me three grandchildren."

"You are not old, though," she said; "you are not as old as me."

And I could have wept with her for her lost youth. I said: "You pass from one glory to another; you are a mother now."

"I am not complaining," she said.

And we sat and looked at one another, recapturing the old times. I was very nearly happy, but I said again: "What is it?"

"I hate to talk about money," she said, "and I can't do it without saying something about Marmaduke. I hate to talk to you about him."

"But, my dear," I said, "don't let's be afraid of Marmaduke. We're agreed that he isn't a model of discretion, confound him! But, after all, he's Marmaduke. Let's put our heads together and make him toe the line." I mixed a metaphor or two in aiming at a general effect.

"I'm afraid this time," she said. "He keeps saying strange things to me. I ask him to explain. He wants money, a lot of money. I know that. He always wanted money, but this is different. I suppose a speculation has gone wrong. I can't check him now. The children—I was thinking—I'm nearly twenty-five now. Is there any way? I know you've done all you could. But to raise money now—if—if—— And we've debts and debts."

"We'll have a talk when he comes in," I said, but we had to wait a long time. She went away to look after

the little ones and then to help to prepare our meal, and I was left to sombre meditation. At last, as we sat talking disjointedly and listening and it was nearly time for me to go to catch my last train, we heard his latchkey scratching. He was not drunk, but he was slightly intoxicated, which was a very unusual thing with him. Helen became stony, and it seemed to me that this was no time for our talk. He displayed a hectic liveliness. He told us he had had a great day. Helen was silent, and I said, "What kind of a great day?"

"Emotional experiences," he said. "The only kind there is."

Rather languidly I continued: "I suppose they had some kind of framework?"

He chuckled, but the chuckle didn't ring true. He affected to be gazing at some image hidden from us; he had a private source of entertainment which he wouldn't reveal, but he wanted us to believe in it. I didn't like the look of him at all. He struck me as reckless or close upon recklessness; his manner to me was not as respectful as usual; he glanced quickly at Helen once or twice, but they had hardly entered into relations yet. I didn't like to leave her. I wanted to be there to protect her; not from any brutality, of course, but from what he called "emotional experiences." I thought of having it out with him then and there, and it even occurred to me that he would sober as the night went on. But Helen told me, decisively, to be gone. I said to her: "I'll miss it if you like," but she shook her head.

Marmaduke became affable with me. "I should enjoy a talk," he said. "Why not stay? I'll find you some pyjamas and a toothpick—toothbrush. A civilized household always has a new toothbrush done up in white tissue-paper. I insist on that. By the by," and he laughed vacantly, "I breakfasted with old Hucklow this morning."

He gave us this information swaggeringly, and it was surprising. Hucklow was the more portly of the two partners whom I had once encountered on Marmaduke's behalf. I didn't know that Marmaduke was on breakfasting terms with him, and it suggested that he was making some kind of progress. The incident recalled, rather ludicrously, college breakfasts or the attempt, occasionally made in the suburbs, to catch their atmosphere. But Hucklow seemed the most improbable of hosts.

"Anyone else there?" I asked, and Marmaduke said, "No, no. The fact is, I wanted to consult him about a little matter. He comes down rather late now. I know his habits."

He began to chuckle again and repeated, "Oh, yes, I know his habits."

There was a puzzling fatuousness about him. I began to think that he was more drunk than I had supposed.

"I saw old Antony at the club," he said. "Droning away."

"What do you mean by 'droning away'?" I said.

"I defend the phrase," Marmaduke said. "Not literally true, of course, but the old boy can give you

that impression without saying a word. Rum thing."

I looked at my watch and stood up. "We must have a talk another time," I said.

"A talk?" he said. "The only talk that's any good to me——" he stopped, and then with remarkable calmness he said: "I suppose you don't want to lend me five thousand pounds?"

I said: "You may be sure I shan't do that."

"You're not an ungenerous man," Marmaduke said, "but you're a bit close with your money. And perhaps you're right. I don't know that the five thousand would be any good to me—now. But sometime within the next week or two I'd better have a talk with you."

I nodded. He seemed to be sobering already. Helen looked at him almost for the first time. He uttered some awful facetiousness about catching it when I'd gone. His imitation high spirits had subsided. I left them with a heavy heart.

The horrid phrase "emotional experiences" had got into my mind. In the railway carriage I sat wondering what those two had been saying to one another. Or had Helen maintained that stony aspect? I was utterly unable to conceive her in a quarreling scene with her husband, and yet she was not made for submission. If you won't quarrel and you won't submit you must be, surely, a powerful personage, and I could almost have laughed to think that Marmaduke wasn't exactly master in his house. But without being master, you can bring the house to destruction; you may be a fool and bring down the house overwhelmingly upon your betters.

Antony was waiting for me at Darley Station, and I felt the good fellow's face to be an ill omen. He walked up my hill with me, after saying that he wanted to come in and talk. It seemed that he was afraid of the shadows, and when we got into my sitting-room I had the absurd idea that before opening out he would see that the windows were shut and listen at the door. He didn't do that, but he waived aside the invitation to whisky and cigarettes. I was thirsty, I was parched; I felt that a drink would help me. I poured out a little whisky and a great deal of soda-water, and then Antony said, "I believe I *am* thirsty." So we stood opposite to one another quaffing and there was a strange air of geniality and entertainment about it. I did feel thankful for him. He was as solid as a rock; he was good, and I like goodness. It may be ridiculous to say it, but I can only like people who are good. The others may entertain me, but I don't like them. But what is goodness? I don't think that there is really any difficulty about that.

Antony put down his glass and then he accepted a cigarette. He sat down and tapped it on the palm of his hand. He was hesitating, but he made his plunge. He said: "I saw Marmaduke at the club to-night."

I said: "I was with Helen when he came home."

He reflected upon that, and I imagined that he had an uncomfortable impression of Marmaduke's return to his home. Then he said: "I'm afraid he was playing the fool."

"Do you mean to-night or generally?" I said.

"Both," said Antony.

"How about to-night?" I asked.

"Well, he made himself very conspicuous after dinner. Men wanted to play bridge quietly and he kept bawling out. He insulted old Rood. He accused him of always trying to get in with weaker players so as to win and he said it was worse than cheating; that some pluck was wanted for that. There'll be a row, especially as there's something in what he said. And then he went on to a general defence of criminals. He said they were no worse than anybody else. He said he could prove it. I don't know what he meant."

"Quite a favourite paradox, isn't it?" I said.

"I dare say," said Antony, "but he seemed to make it significant. And it's rather curious that he was talking like this before Bradwell."

"Bradwell?"

"Of Bradwell & Perry."

"The stockbrokers?"

"Yes. His stockbrokers."

"What's the point?"

"When Marmaduke had gone," Antony said, "Bradwell came to me and we talked together in a corner about him. Bradwell isn't a bad fellow, and he told me he was anxious about him. He knew I was Marmaduke's friend, and said I mustn't let him pump me more than I liked. But if I liked to tell him anything helpful about Marmaduke's resources—well, we got rather confidential. I fancy he violated professional etiquette, which is a pretty serious thing to do. You see, Marmaduke has had a speculative account open—he's gone bull on several things and they've

slumped fearfully. The differences have been piling up and Bradwell couldn't go on without some security."

"And Marmaduke had none to offer."

"Yes, he had. That's the curious thing; he had."

"Did Bradwell tell you what they are?"

"He did. I've forgotten for the moment. Quite good industrial debentures transferred to him recently, it seems."

"But how on earth could Marmaduke buy for investment like this? He never has any money. These fools let him speculate, but it's at their own risk."

"It's an insoluble mystery," said Antony.

"It can't be insoluble," I said.

We sat staring at one another, and it came to me that Antony had yet something to say.

"Well?" I said.

"Bradwell told me something rather curious. You'll understand that he hadn't any business to do it. This was a confidential talk—on both sides."

"Well?"

"It seems that these debentures, or whatever they are, had been transferred from Hucklow to Marmaduke."

"That's very odd," I said.

"Bradwell thought it odd," said Antony.

"What's the inwardness of it all?" I said.

"Mr. Daunt, I must tell you. Bradwell has a very ugly suspicion."

My mind darted to Helen. "What is it?" I said.

"He suspects that the scrip is stolen and the transfer forged."

My apprehensions seemed to materialize suddenly and to deal me a blow. I said, "Incredible!" and in a moment I felt it wasn't incredible at all. I spared Antony any further exclamations. I said: "How far have things gone? What has Bradwell done?"

"He's in an awkward position. He isn't sure and he's afraid of a mistake."

"What has he done?"

"To begin with, he's closed the account."

"Well?"

"He saw Marmaduke yesterday and questioned him. Marmaduke was sulky and took the high horse. Bradwell said he must write to Hucklow and ask him a question. I don't know exactly how he would put it."

"Yes."

"And did he?"

"What did Hucklow say?"

"Bradwell was waiting. He's heard nothing today."

"Marmaduke knew he was writing?"

"I suppose so."

"But," I said, "granting that Marmaduke would do this, it's a preposterous expedient. It must get found out."

"I imagine him to be desperate," said Antony. "If the stock had gone up he might conceivably have got the scrip back and put it where he found it. If Hucklow looked at it he would see it had been tampered

with, but these investment securities lie undisturbed in safes for years."

"You say Hucklow didn't reply to Bradwell?"

"He had heard nothing yesterday."

"Why!" I said, "Marmaduke told me that he breakfasted with Hucklow yesterday."

Antony stared at this. "Queer," he said.

"There's so much that's queer that we'll hope it's not as bad as it looks," I said. And then I added: "I suppose I ought to be angry with you for making these aspersions on my son-in-law." It was a dreary piece of facetiousness.

Antony said: "It hurts me, too."

I was hopeless. And between us was the consciousness that an awful calamity was descending on Helen, that nothing could be done. And yet some attempt at prevention, at mitigation, must be made. Antony rose to go, with some commonplace about the impossibility of doing anything to-night. It occurred to me that I might, even now, get a car and drive in to Manchester, rouse the sleeping house and compel Marmaduke to an explanation. To what end? I was hopeless. The morning would come soon enough. The calamity was upon us, and as yet I couldn't see behind it.

I walked with Antony to the gate and said good-night to him under the dome of stars. I heard his footsteps die away. I was encompassed with quiet, with safety. Who was it that said, "Godly night"? Who called it that? I must be up betimes. It was midnight, and perhaps she was sleeping now, sleeping

by her husband. The night was about them, too. All the menacing, clutching forces were suspended. Poor Antony! He must say to himself sometimes: If only she had married me. But there was no triumph here for him. He had said that this hurt him, and it was true. Randal must be told. She had a sufficiency of useless protectors. I must be up betimes. It would be queer if I overslept myself. A kind of joke! While the world exists it will never be without its jokes.

Chapter 13

I CAUGHT an early morning train to Manchester and received the facetious congratulations of acquaintances, some of whom were mildly curious about my business. Feeling that no time should be lost, I took a taxi to the house. As I turned after paying the man, I saw Helen's staring face at the window. She let me in and I kissed her, but she was cold and her eyes were wide upon me. She didn't make a specific inquiry. It seemed that calamity was in the air. She told me that Marmaduke was still abed and "saw no good in getting up." She was giving the children their breakfasts, immersed in blessed routine. I had a glimpse of them, poor innocents, and did my best at hearty, jocular greetings. They were splashing their porridge about in quite a reassuring way.

Then I went up and knocked at Marmaduke's door. He grunted forbiddingly, but I went into the room. His eyes were startled and inquiring. I said I wanted him to get up and come down at once, that I had something to say to him. Sullenly he said, "Can't you say it here?"

I considered that, and said No. It didn't seem the proper setting and we must be about and doing something.

Helen came in and I liked the environment less than

ever. He sprawled on a great bed which they occupied together commonly, and he looked like a naughty child. She said: "What is it?" I hadn't made up my mind whether I wanted him alone or whether we had better all plunge into it at once. It seemed impossible now to wait while he dressed and shaved. A strange question flitted across my mind. Would he be the more likely to cut his throat before or after our discussion? It would be a horrible simplification and I recoiled from it. Looking at the figure on the bed, I hardly feared it.

And Helen was there, and she was what mattered and we must get on: we were doing nothing. The chance that he was an innocent man maligned was negligible. Poor devil! Apparent guilt was seen in him. So it seemed to me as he lay there watching us. He didn't ask for any explanation of my visit, but Helen said again, "What's the matter?" And I could almost have believed that she wasn't interested in the reply.

I turned to Marmaduke and said: "Tell her." And then it seemed to me that this was hardly fair. I said: "You gave Bradwell some securities. What's wrong with them?"

In a lamentable voice he said, "Already?" He sat up in bed and clasped his knees, tucking them under his chin. Then he said: "Who told you?"

Helen stood regarding him gravely. I turned to her and said: "Marmaduke is a child, and this time, he's a bad child. He's in an awful mess."

"How do you know about it?" said he.

I told them what I had heard from Antony and at his name Marmaduke frowned and looked at Helen. She listened silently, and I wished that she would say something. Perhaps the technical terms were strange to her, but she didn't interrupt. I should have been ready to discuss forgery as an everyday matter that might happen to any of us, if that could have helped her. Marmaduke was gloomy, but he began to chuckle at one point. This was when I referred to the letter Bradwell had sent to Hucklow. "He never got it," said Marmaduke, and then the poor fool explained how he had intercepted it. He was at the office early in the morning and couldn't find it among the letters waiting to be opened. "You see," he said, "I had to get hold of that other letter, the one from the company to Hucklow about the transfer. But Bradwell had written to Hucklow's private house. I thought that must be it and I rushed off there."

"I know his habits," continued Marmaduke triumphantly, "and so I got into his library. Think of a fellow like that with a library! I suppose he bought the books at so much the square yard. Well, I got the letter—smelt it out—and presently in comes Hucklow and I had a bogus consultation with him about nothing in particular. I made him invite me to breakfast; I was determined on that. He didn't want me, but I made up a story about missing my breakfast and he couldn't very well avoid—you see, I thought the situation would be piquant. I'm playing for small stakes now. It's no good. Of course I see that. It's like pulling the rudder hard in a bumping race when you

know they've got you. Merely a gesture for my own amusement."

He talked rapidly, and in some excitement. His mind clung to the details of his paltry exploit. It was awful frivolity and I saw him as a light fellow with whom, incredibly, we had become entangled. He didn't want to face what must be faced, but yet I could see that his eye was on Helen. Was it in commiseration, deprecation, remorse? It came upon me that I didn't know these people. I didn't know what their relations were and perhaps they didn't know much themselves. As a novelist, I spend my life in the study and exposition of the relations of men and women, and here, before my eyes, was a case, a simple case, and I was baffled and bewildered. I had never understood Helen with Marmaduke, though I had had glimpses, made guesses. Now, it was all strange and unexplored. Surely he wasn't merely light, however reckless he might be. He had ideas that were not just the froth of wit. And he had loved Helen passionately; I believed that. His love might be overlaid, diminished, thwarted, merged in his own wretched egoism, but once it was upspringing, even noble. We are at the mercy of time and chance.

And she, in some fashion, had loved him. She had, as they say, "taken him on," and she wasn't one to let go. He was still her husband and the father of her children. And at last she spoke to him. She said: "Does it mean that you forged?"

"There you are!" he cried. "The power of words! A forger! It's a trifling matter. It's a comparatively

clean crime. I'm very much as I was before. Perhaps I wasn't very much before. The law gets the proportions all wrong. Wife-beating now! Or robbing poor people! Who suffers by what I've done? Only people who can afford it."

"That's rather difficult to arrange," I said sardonically.

"I tell you I thought it out," he said. "Of course I'd have put it straight if Bradwell had kept quiet and these damned things had gone up as they ought to do."

"How could you," I said, "when you'd tampered with the papers?"

"Put 'em back," he said. "A bit of scratching out. They mightn't have been disturbed for years, and if they were, who's to know what happened?"

"You thought it out?" I said. "Did you think of your wife and children?"

"I suppose I'm a selfish brute," he said. And then he turned to her. "There's no possible defence. I'm an egoist. I'm a bad kind of egoist. I've no respect for law except that it might hurt me. It's going to hurt me. But I've been treacherous to you—even you. And there are those poor little children downstairs. I'm a colossal fool, that's all. I'm not hard enough to be a good criminal. How could I do it? That bothers me. An egoist is a monomaniac. It was a sort of adventure. It might have come out all right."

This was all pretty cool, but I saw that he was trembling. And suddenly he showed his excitement. He flung out his hands. "What can I do?" he cried. "I'm ready to make amends now, when it's impossi-

ble. Any nobility of sacrifice would be easy to me now. Just tell me what to do."

He was still interested in himself, but he wasn't ready for the exercise of any stern thought. I was sorry for him, but I didn't accomplish a sympathetic tone when I told him that the first thing was to dress and come downstairs. He looked terrified at the idea of coming down. He was merely dilatory; he had no programme, no plan; he wanted to lie in bed and talk. He could talk as well as anybody, but if he tried to do something, he would lose his advantage. He looked from one to the other of us; his excitement had died down; I saw him as a frightened child.

Helen had been staring at him with a set face, and I was actually conscious of a fear that she might be hard with him. It would be salutary, perhaps, but Helen as a hard, estranged wife would seem to me like the end of the world. And as I wondered and hesitated she moved to the bed, she sat on the edge of it beside him. He looked round in apprehension but, meeting her eyes, he bent towards her, and she took his head in the crook of her arm and laid it on her breast. He began to sob, and I felt that he shouldn't have done that; it was intolerable. He went on sobbing and sniffing, and I turned away. It wasn't decent, it wasn't right. I want the world to be decorous, I want fortitude; without that all is lost. I was weakened and humiliated.

And yet, turning to look at her, I saw that all was not lost. Without weakness you cannot have strength; in a stoical world there is no place for help. She com-

forted him. You could believe that presently he would go to sleep, but there wasn't time for that. She said to me, "Can you save him?" and I replied, "I'm here to attempt it."

And yet up to that moment I hadn't a programme, I hadn't an intention. I had reviewed possibilities, of course, and continually I came back to the idea that the man had done wrong and must take his punishment; that we must acquiesce in it; that this was the way of honour and dignity. And then, in a moment, this was swept away. My human instincts prevailed, and I felt that I must try to save my children. I had a great access of tenderness for Marmaduke. I couldn't now dissociate him from her. I wasn't a Roman father, and she, I suppose, would never make a Roman mother.

Helen promised to produce him, dressed and shaved, in half an hour, and I went downstairs. Three merry young people were rattling their spoons, and presently their bibs were taken off and they tumbled about the room. I was left with the two eldest, and we played together in a fashion that was ineffective, lugubrious; I couldn't strike the note. They began to quarrel, and I was ready to believe that it was typical of an ill-starred world. Helen came in and hustled them away. Marmaduke was trying to eat some breakfast that she had taken to him on a tray. She wanted to have a word with me.

She wished to say that she trusted me utterly. I think she meant that she trusted me a long way, but that there was an uneasy corner in her mind yet. It

was about money. Would I be ready to bribe high enough? To satisfy these rapacious creatures? Her money, of course. And what about my own? She didn't put it directly. I told her I was ready to compound a felony, to impoverish myself, to take any means to save him. She asked what compounding a felony was, and when I explained, she said: "Then you might be sent to prison?" She looked at me with awe. Her eyes filled with tears and she said: "You mustn't. You mustn't do that." I told her it was very unlikely that I should get the chance. Quickly she said: "You mean that you can't save him?"

I was sensitive to the shadow of reproach. I attempted reassurance; and I was conscious of my enormous importance to her. I was an heroic figure; even now I would bask in her admiration. I said, "Leave it to me," and I suppose I never uttered anything more fatuous. Then Marmaduke came in, and the poor wretch was not quite innocent of a snigger. He said that we were going to have a very interesting day, and then that he was thirsty, that he must have a drink. She let him have a whisky and soda. Her farewell of him, before the children, might have been just the daily habit. Yet there was to me a queer air of an excursion, an adventure. Marmaduke kissed all the children and set off with me jauntily.

Chapter 14

We took the tram to town like respectable citizens, and it wasn't easy to realize that our position was really so extraordinary. Marmaduke was humble and ready to accept any suggestion of mine. Looking round on our fellow-passengers he murmured: "Happy bourgeois." I think he wanted to establish command of himself; he was concerned in some kind of mental rehearsal. He appeared to assume that the murder was out or must be out immediately; that his exploit of the breakfast had only meant a slight delay. I had some curiosity about the steps of his reckless folly, but it was useless to question him now. Our plan was to see Bradwell, to see Hucklow; to make a clean breast of it; to pay all that was due. At the back of my mind was the idea of bribery. I didn't know my men. And I didn't know how far Bradwell had gone already.

We called at his office, and I asked to see him. He was out, but they knew where he was and could put me in touch with him if it was important. I said it was. Marmaduke was hovering near when a telephone number was mentioned. He came up to me and whispered: "That's our number. Hucklow & Birchin. He's there. The fat's in the fire."

Almost immediately I was put in communication

with Bradwell. I told him I was speaking from his office and gave my name. "Daunt?" he repeated with a startled intonation. I said that my son-in-law was with me, and that we would both come across to see him and Mr. Hucklow. If he would kindly remain there we would be over in five minutes.

He said, "Wait a bit," and there was a long pause. With the receiver at my ear I was conscious occasionally of the attenuation of angry utterances. At last Bradwell's voice said: "I'm afraid it's useless for you to come here, Mr. Daunt." I said: "I must see you. It's impossible to explain by telephone." He said: "It's no use."

"May I ask Mr. Hucklow to have a word with me?"

There was a moment's pause and the voice came: "Mr. Hucklow declines."

"Look here!" I said. "I demand to be treated with reason and courtesy. I propose to come over at once."

"Wait," he said.

Presently the voice came: "If you'll wait where you are I'll come across."

I said: "It will be far better for us to come over and see you together."

"That's impossible," he said, and rang off.

And then I became conscious of an audience. Curious faces were peering at us. Marmaduke was well known at the office, and whether these people knew anything of our business or not they scented something queer. I explained curtly to an attendant clerk

that Mr. Bradwell was coming over and we would wait. We were shown into an empty office.

Marmaduke had heard my share of the conversation and didn't require much explanation. We stared at almanacs and charts and the dull paraphernalia of the office. I would have said something encouraging, but only the mere futilities occurred to me. It was horrible. Suddenly Marmaduke said: "Will he bring a Bobby with him?"

I was startled. I said: "Oh, no!" But I wasn't sure. We were on quicksands. "Not much good in making a rush," said Marmaduke, and then he added: "Poor Helen!"

And, indeed, for the moment I had forgotten Helen. The present fear, the sinister menace, were too acute. I tried to rally my thoughts. People do wrong and they must be punished. I'm enlightened and humane, and I conceive punishment as an attempt at adjustment to a natural order. But when frightful arrears of punishment have to be worked off! When the greatness of the crime demands the obliteration of the criminal! Would society be helped by putting Marmaduke to pick oakum for years? Oakum or whatever it is.

My eye fell on a telephone, and it occurred to me that they might have let me use it here in private. No matter. I had an idea, and without appealing to Marmaduke I looked up Hucklow's number in the telephone book and made a memorandum on the blotting-paper. I wanted to be ready, alert. I thought of Helen then.

I'm too soft, perhaps. Marmaduke was spoiling Helen's life and mine and sinning shamefully against the community, but here he was, a familiar young man; a friend; yes, a friend. And if I was miserable and dejected to an extreme degree, how was it with him? It's too much to face. Prison! Is it possible to do anything bad enough for that? What could I do to comfort him? I put out my hand. I took his arm. "My dear boy——" I began. I don't know what I was going to say. The door opened and Bradwell came in alone.

Our lives are commonly like the rehearsal of old pieces, and when we are given something new we don't know how to act. Bradwell, I suppose, was a man of the world and not more ill-natured than most, but in a difficult situation he couldn't behave properly. He wished to be firm, and so he adopted a bullying manner with large gestures of negation: "Now, Mr. Daunt, it isn't the slightest use"—and so on. But it appeared that, whatever course he "might have been disposed to adopt," Hucklow was adamant. He played Hucklow after the manner of Mr. Spenlow and the inexorable Jorkins. I tried to keep my temper. I appealed to him. I flattered him. I felt that if I got angry all was lost. I suspected that he was very much to blame for Marmaduke's excesses, that he had encouraged him in these absurd speculations. I may have been unjust. Bradwell spoke now as business virtue incarnate, as the embodiment of honour and rectitude in affairs which had made England what it is. Marmaduke would have intervened, but I wouldn't

let him, fearing an indiscretion; I was quite capable of being effectively indiscreet myself.

"Bradwell," I said, "I speak to you as a humane and understanding man. Abney has done a frightful thing. There's no defence, no excuse. But I ask you to take my point of view—to make it your own. It happens that no harm is done; the step can be recalled. What good will you do by sending him to prison? We'll do anything in the world you ask. You won't suffer; nobody will suffer. Give him another chance. It's only like exercising a first offender's act. You'll never regret it."

"You don't understand," he began helplessly.

I interrupted him. I wasn't standing on my dignity. I could have been eloquent with the right man before me. As it was I was consciously histrionic. "I'm trying to save my daughter," I said—"my grandchildren." I had my tongue in my cheek, and then, again, I was simple and sincere. "The fellow isn't bad," I said.

It was as Marmaduke had said. These business people have a curious horror of forgery. Perhaps it's partly that it enters largely into melodrama on which they are brought up. And, of course, its prevalence would make business difficult, though I can't see that it's morally worse than selling cotton as linen. I didn't stray into these refinements. I let Bradwell have his say, and he wound up with the inexorable Jorkins again. Briskly, almost joyfully, I said: "I see. I see. If he will relent you are willing—pardon me, then——" and I clutched the telephone receiver. I saw Bradwell

out of the corner of my eye when I gave Hucklow's number, and he was a figure of alarmed incredulity. I said: "Will you speak to him or shall I?"

Marmaduke told me afterwards that he enjoyed this performance. He said I was a first-rate comedian, and I believe I felt that I was doing my best. But that fool Bradwell concentrated on the point that I was taking a liberty. Of course I was. He was disclaiming vaguely and violently when a voice came at the other end of the wire. I asked for Mr. Hucklow and mentioned Bradwell's name. I didn't attempt to personate him, but said that he was here. And Hucklow came.

I declared my identity and went on rapidly in spite of a choleric exclamation. I thought he was going to ring off, and I said: "Mr. Hucklow, a matter of great importance to you has developed. I am here with Mr. Bradwell, and he is willing to reconsider that matter if you—— We will be across directly." And then I rang off, and it occurred to me that I might have made a mistake, that he might now simply go out and so baffle us. I had wanted to get Bradwell to commit himself to something, but now he turned sulky and positively declined to accompany us. "It's no use, I tell you," he said, and as Marmaduke and I hurried out he called after us: "There's a warrant out for his arrest."

So that was it. I took Marmaduke's arm, and as we walked quickly through the streets I said: "You know Hucklow's room, of course. We'll go right in without asking for him." He said: "You're wonderful,

but I think it's time to chuck it." "Not yet," I said.

We burst in upon Hucklow. His hat was on and his partner, Birchin, was with him. I think he would have been off in another minute. He was angry, blusterous, excited, exclamatory. I took the word. "Mr. Hucklow," I cried, "I take a grave liberty. Consider my position and excuse me. I am here to make any reparation possible; to save this young man from the consequences of his misdeeds." I went on volubly, watching my man; I brought in the wife and children, his own position as a humane and understanding man. I had rehearsed all this on Bradwell; I felt beaten, but I wasn't going to give in. I was quite unscrupulous and grossly exaggerated Bradwell's concessions, if, indeed, he had made any. Birchin brought me up by saying: "It's no use. The warrant's out."

"Yes," I said, "but it can be withdrawn." I didn't know anything about that, and "How?" he said.

With the utmost confidence I asserted that Mr. Hucklow had only to communicate with the Chief Constable and tell him that another complexion had been put on the matter, that there had been a mistake, indiscretion and so on. It was not too late. I reiterated arguments. I thought I was making an impression on the fuming, fretting fellow. And then he brought up the matter of the breakfast.

I believe that cooked Marmaduke's goose. Mr. Hucklow recalled the incident with the most embittered resentment. "No, Mr. Daunt," he said, "there is no hope for a man who could do that. He went into my library, he stole my letter—must have done—and then,

at my invitation, he took a place at my breakfast table. It is a terrible example of duplicity."

I pleaded that the man was desperate, that the folly of it was childish, and we must treat him as a child. I laboured points; I was beaten. He stuck at that breakfast and "A man who could do that." I tried bullying. I said: "Do you mean to tell me that you wish him to go to prison? Are you so brutal, so inhumane? Mr. Hucklow, I am giving *you* a chance."

Birchin said, "I think you had better go," and Hucklow acquiesced in mutters and grunts. And then I played my last card. I tried to bribe them. I have said that I was unscrupulous; I tried simply and grossly to bribe them. I felt myself passionately on Marmaduke's side. At least he was better than these fellows who had no compassion, no principles, nothing but a fear of the law and a habit of keeping within it. How did I know? I did know.

I said: "You are business men. You are open to" —I hesitated—"a consideration. I am ready to make it worth your while to drop this prosecution, to take measures to check it at once."

Hucklow gasped and Birchin said: "What d'ye mean?"

I said: "There is such a thing, I believe, as compounding a felony. Naturally you don't want to come within the law. But surely we can get round that."

"You are getting on very dangerous ground, sir," said Birchin. "I advise you to go no further."

"Most extraordinary!" said Hucklow.

But they waited and "I will, if you please, name a

sum," I said. "Of course Mr. Bradwell must be brought in. Shall we telephone for him?"

"You take my breath away," said Hucklow. "Do you mean to say——"

"I confess to some curiosity about the figure," said Birchin.

"You would like me to name it?"

"You must do what you like about that."

"Ten thousand pounds," I said. And I was thinking: Am I a fantastic fool? This isn't real. I want to do this for her. I'm romantic. I'm not thinking of this poor boy now.

I saw Hucklow and Birchin look at one another. I saw astonishment, cupidity, fear, in them. They didn't know what to say. They were silent, ready to pretend that it was merely a wicked and preposterous proposal that shocked them. They were wondering whether it was possible.

Marmaduke laid his hand on my arm. "No," he said.

In a low voice I said to him: "It's for Helen."

"Ah! but," he said, "it would leave you nothing and her nothing."

I said: "We'll stand together, my boy."

"Not that way," he said. He turned to the partners who were staring and listening. "I don't think there's any more to be done," he said. "I'm sorry. Good morning."

I said to Mr. Hucklow: "You see, he's not altogether a bad fellow."

They burst out together into exclamations of re-

pudiation and pious horror. Such a proposal was an insult. It merited the gravest reprobation. Allowances might be made for my unfortunate position. Yet nothing could justify such a cynical suggestion. "A man who could do that——" began Hucklow, and stopped. That other black episode of the breakfast had occurred to him. Birchin said: "And how do we know that it wasn't a trick? If we mention this it won't help him much at the trial."

"Then, by God!" I said, "I advise you not to mention it. If you do——"

I left it at that and they were uneasy and a little alarmed, I think. They hadn't clear consciences. I don't quite know what I meant. Hucklow said: "I must ask you to leave this office."

I made a final, useless effort. "Gentlemen," I said, "I ask your pardon. I appeal to your humanity. You can save this young man from penal servitude. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that for what he has done the punishment to him and to all of us is too great. You will never regret it if you are merciful."

Hucklow said: "We have a duty to society."

Birchin said: "Unless you leave at once I telephone for the police."

Marmaduke said: "It'll do as well here as anywhere."

But it seemed that they didn't want that, and Marmaduke and I went out together. I saw that the poor boy looked up and down the street. I took his arm again, and I might have wanted it for my own sup-

port. I was deeply dejected. He said: "They would have been fools to agree, but they want more capital. That money dangled before them must have been tantalizing."

We wandered aimlessly, jostled by busy people. "I shall often think of this," he said, "think of your goodness. I don't know why you do it. Oh yes, of course! Helen! But I'm best out of the way."

"Helen; yes," I said. "But you too. I think I've felt like Flora Macdonald trying to save Prince Charlie. What did she care about law or politics or anything else? One doesn't stick at a trifle."

"You've done everything that's possible and more."

"I've a ridiculous feeling," I said, "that I might have done better if I'd been a personage. Why wasn't I a personage?"

"Let's go back and tell them that you're really a very distinguished man," said Marmaduke. "I'll offer to lend them your books."

"And besmirch the pure soul of Hucklow?" I said.

We couldn't keep up this sort of thing. We were spent and weary. Marmaduke said: "Let's go home to Helen."

"Wouldn't you rather lunch first?" I said. I was thinking that we might not reach the house. He understood. "We'll risk it," he said.

We turned sadly homewards. Stopping at a post office I said: "Do you mind if I wire to Randal to come? I want Randal." I felt that I was becoming pathetic. He looked at me and "Yes, yes, of course," he said, and then he added, "there's Randal too."

So he added to his self-reproaches. Humorously he went on: "It's very much as though I were dying. Hope abandoned. Call 'em round the bed. It's a wonderful invention—the law. Do you remember Watts's picture of Love and Death? Why didn't he call it 'The Law'?"

He wasn't truculent or assertive; a little facetiously defensive, perhaps. I had never liked him better. I sent my telegram. There was nothing for Randal to do, but I felt that we must have him. And we set off to walk home to Helen. I resisted the inclination to take his arm again. It would seem like holding him. Some damned policeman might take his arm directly.

Chapter 15

As we approached home we encountered Antony cruising about in a motor-car which, I suppose, he had hired or borrowed. He asked for our news, and I told him that it was desperate. And Antony said: "Will he run for it?" indicating the car. I thought: I'm not the only wild one. Here's another romanticist, another offender against the law. Antony said that he could put him down at any out-of-the-way place he liked. They might go together for a little holiday—change their names, of course. Then we could think things over. Appleby! What about Appleby? He had heard it was one of the quietest places under the sun, and a very pretty place too. He seemed to think that Marmaduke would like a pretty place. Probably there was a golf course there, and they might get some fishing. It would be necessary to act at once. There was the question of clothes and things. He talked rapidly and nervously, looking about the street. I suppose he was making a fool of himself. We were ready to do that for Helen.

I said: "But if you disappeared together there would be two chances of catching you instead of one. And then the car——"

He said he hadn't thought of that; indeed, he didn't quite see it. As to the car, he made some kind of explanation to which I didn't listen. And then: "Per-

haps London would be best," he said. "Lodgings, you know. Easily get you there. Can you smuggle out some clothes? I suppose it's dangerous to take them openly?"

Marmaduke said: "You're damned good, Antony, but it's best now that I should face the music."

"Are you sure?" said Antony. "We might get you out of the country."

"Oh! Let's get it over," Marmaduke said. "I should never have a moment's peace till I was caught. I once read about a Sinn Fein fellow on the run. And when at last a policeman tapped him on the shoulder it was the happiest moment of his life."

"Perhaps you're right," said Antony, and after a hesitation he said: "But Helen——"

"It's best for Helen," Marmaduke said.

The two looked at one another. They shook hands. Then Antony said to me: "May I call round this evening?" I nodded. He waved his hand and started off.

"I hope we can get there," Marmaduke said. "I must see Helen." He was very anxious now. He was concentrated on that idea of seeing her again. I suppose he wanted to feel her arms about him; to sob out confessions, protestations, perhaps. I don't know.

We looked suspiciously at guileless citizens as they approached us, but it didn't appear to be anybody's business to stop us. At last we marched up to the front door as bold as brass and Marmaduke's latch-key let us in. Helen was there at once, shutting a

door on cheerful clamour. She looked at me and I shook my head, and then she smiled at him. Again she looked at me: "You couldn't do it?" There was no reproach, but for the moment I suffered the bitterness of failure. And then Marmaduke broke into a magnificent eulogy of me and of the efforts I had made. I tried to stop him, but he had his say. I had hold of his arm again, and she came to his other side. We drew together, and it was as when with your wife and child you make a three-cornered embrace. We were almost happy together. Marmaduke, for the moment, was like his gay old self. His laugh rang out when he said: "The ridiculous old man offered them ten thousand." And she laughed too. We all laughed together like maniacs. It might have been the best joke in the world, and I suppose that, really, it wasn't a bad one.

And then they went off together, and I was glad that they should have this last intimate talk. I went in to the children and I took them on gallantly, liberating the maid. I was with them a long time; I grew tired. I felt neglected. And they were neglected too, for I was roused by "Grandpa isn't lookin'." Why didn't something happen? Did time stand still?

It was not till months afterwards when Helen's child was on the way that she told me what I felt to be a very strange and moving thing about that morning. There had been some estrangement between her and Marmaduke, and now he was going to prison, and it might be for years. All the time he would

be thinking that they had ceased to be truly man and wife. I think that she did not love him now with any carnal passion, and a woman who has three babies doesn't want a fourth. But in her pity and the affection stimulated by this misfortune she had offered her body to his embrace. They had been again lovers together; she had given him her pledge of faithfulness.

She told me of this, she said, because she had no mother. I don't know that this was logical. I accepted it; I was honoured to take that mother's place. She wanted us to understand—him and me—that she would wait for him, that "all this" would make no difference.

There was a time when I might have received this confession, this confidence, with resentment and distaste. I could be sentimental about the sacredness of her body, I could make fine confusions with ideals of chastity and austerity. And now, it seemed to me, I was capable of a more spiritual conception. Marmaduke was not quite worthless, but he was unworthy; and yet she couldn't turn him away. I suppose that women of a powerful egoism can free themselves from domestic entanglement; they can take back what they have given. Helen was born to help, to comfort, to endure.

I recall that Helen and Marmaduke were very gentle with one another, while we waited for the bolt to fall. The three of us had lunch decorously, and Helen brought up a bottle of wine. When we had finished our meal we drank coffee and smoked and

we waited, waited. The delay was disconcerting, and we were all conscious of an unusualness to the point of unreality. We had no experience of arrests or warrants, and we began to wonder whether they wanted him to get away. I suppose we regard these movements initiated by the law as forces of a sinister mechanism, or else as manifestations of the sleuth-hound. But, indeed, they depend on human agency. Doubtless policemen and detectives like to have their meals regularly, and to have a pipe after dinner. An arrest is all in the day's work. Anyhow, our friends did not turn up till half-past three.

Two men, who might have been green-grocers or publicans, came to the door and rang the bell. There was a policeman within call and another, it appeared, at the back. The plain-clothes men were invited to enter—perhaps this was unnecessary—and they seemed pleased to understand that their job would be a simple one. They offered to read the warrant, but Marmaduke said he wouldn't trouble them. "Awful verbiage," he said to me. They were watchful and alert, but they seemed to think that handcuffs would not be necessary, and they agreed readily to the suggestion of a cab. I think that there were traces of apology in their manners, and when one of them caught sight of the children I heard him mutter, "Dear! Dear!"

We were all remarkably cool. Helen had packed a bag with some clothes, and the men, regarding it doubtfully, did not object to his taking it. I offered to go to the police-station with them in the cab, but the

chief of the two said: "Better not. You see, in that case we should have to handcuff him." I suppose I should have been a potential accomplice in a possible attempt at escape.

Marmaduke went to the nursery and solemnly kissed his children; he shook my hand; his captors and I turned away while he said good-bye to Helen. Then they got into an old four-wheeler and it drove away, leaving Helen and me staring blankly after it.

Chapter 16

We had plenty of agitation and emotion to come, but it was, perhaps, in the nature of anti-climax. There was a burst of publicity, and we all became personages in the public eye. "Son-in-law of local author arrested" was a newspaper headline, but I am afraid I didn't take the chances of advertisement that this suggested. We fenced with condolences which were formal, officious, kindly, generous, sacred, grieved; rarely, indeed, let it be said, malicious. You soon get accustomed to having a forger for your husband or son-in-law; I think the chief difference to me, above the surface, was that people paid me a more punctilious, a more emphatic, respect. Perhaps they avoided me a little more than usual, but I am not quite unaccustomed to be avoided. I don't fit like an old glove.

The proceedings before the magistrate were brief, defence was reserved, the prisoner committed for trial; there was no question of bail.

And then came the long time between the committal and the trial, and this was difficult for us all. We saw Marmaduke when we could and he was bitterly dejected, though he did his best to maintain some semblance of fortitude before Helen. She was older day by day. It is a paradox and a platitude that a great

misfortune may be not hard to bear. Opposed to it, almost balancing it, are the reactionary excitements. Helen had been greatly moved, even exalted, and her pity had refreshed her affection; now, to see her husband in his cell was to realize that her awakened sympathies would be rudely checked, the outpourings of her nature frozen. He was taken from her, and presently he would recede even more deeply into the grim *oubliette*. We talk of accepting the inevitable, but this is one of the formulas of stoicism, and our stoicism is a mere façade. And now they confronted a dim wall of years. They concentrated terribly on the question: How long?

Helen sat beside me at the trial, and she listened to the tale of her husband's folly and crime with a calmness that might have seemed implacable. Randal and Antony were not far away, and with Marmaduke in the dock there was a queer suggestion of the family party. The hard formality of the occasion was tempered by the proximate and the familiar. In the court, friends and foes seemed strangely mingled. I could have stretched out my hand and touched Hucklow on the shoulder. And when counsel chatted with Hucklow for a few minutes it reminded me of Mr. Pickwick's indignation when Sergeant Snubbin saluted Sergeant Buzfuz. I had so rarely been in a Court of Justice that most of my analogies were drawn from fiction.

Counsel had advised, on technical grounds that we didn't quite appreciate, a plea of not guilty, but the facts were not in dispute, and no witness was called for Marmaduke in reference to them. His counsel

made what he could of his readiness to recall the step, of the fact that he was actually attempting confession and restitution before the warrant against him was executed. I was called to make the point that nobody would suffer, nobody would be out of pocket by what he had done. But forgery, in the eye of the law, is a terrible crime. It menaces the structure of society.

And poor Marmaduke didn't help himself. He had concentrated on the idea of defining his position and giving, as he put it, "one in the eye" to the hated system that had enslaved him. In spite of cautions and appeals from his counsel he availed himself of the opportunity to address the court before the case went to the jury. And his case amounted to this—that all the business activities of Manchester, so far as he knew them, were directed simply to the end of personal enrichment; that altruism, pity, charity, good citizenship had no share in them. The only limitation to rapacity was the law, and this had no correspondence with moral law. Relax your law and the business man takes advantage; tighten it and he resentfully obeys. He does not steal and forge, because it would be bad policy to do so. He is afraid, and the difference between him and the criminal—and so on.

Of course he was pulled up by the judge, who asked him to confine his remarks to the particular case, and declined to listen to any exposition of general principles. So poor Marmaduke's speech was fragmentary, and at one point the judge asked him if he meant that on regaining his freedom he would

continue the course that had brought him to the dock. Marmaduke was a little alarmed at this, and intimated that he had learnt his lesson; but he was doing himself no good, and his counsel was manifestly impatient. Brought back to realities, he admitted handsomely that he had done wrong. He made a queerly worded apology to society. He had been contaminated, it appeared, by contact with this foul thing called business. Asked again to confine himself to the case, he said he could not admit that he was on a lower moral plane than his prosecutors. "I have been accused of ingratitude," he said, "but that is a greater crime than any I have committed." Pointing at Hucklow, he said: "This is merely a malignant old man. I believe he would have let me off but for that breakfast." There was a burst of laughter, but Hucklow had stressed this matter, and counsel had dwelt on it as an indication of facility in crime. But Marmaduke's speech wasn't a success, and he seemed to feel that. It was not quite frivolous, but it sounded so. At last he turned toward us and shook his head slightly. He bowed to the judge, and stood back.

It was a relief. Helen and I sat there, feeling and thinking in unison. He had had a touch or two of his old wit, but he had been strained, irrelevant, nervously agitated. She had watched him without irritation or rancour. Grief and the consternation of the occasion did not confuse her steady brain nor chill her generous heart. I followed her feelings, her thoughts; I saw Marmaduke through her pitiful eyes.

And now the question in our minds was, three years

or five, and my hand tightened on Helen's when we knew that it was five. Marmaduke looked at Helen, with a brave smile. He had the gratification of maintaining his dignity. We overheard his counsel say to his solicitor with bitterness: "Two years extra for that speech," and the solicitor nodded and shrugged. I don't know. Are judges swayed like that?

The judge stretched himself and looked at his watch. Another batch of jurymen was filing in. There was some shuffling of counsel and their papers. Marmaduke was already in the past. Helen went home to her children. And then for a time I found myself outside, beset with conjectures, alone.

Chapter 17

THE wisdom of the ages has determined that when the spirit is oppressed it is well the body should be active. Helen had a good deal to do, and to tend her children gave a sufficiency of work. It is only sentimentalists who believe that a mother's commerce with her children is pure joy, and perhaps the small problems and even the small irritations were good for her. And now when it was decided that they should come and live with me at Darley all manner of decisions and actions pressed upon her. The house must be, if possible, sub-let; some of the furniture sold and some stored; preparations, rearrangements were necessary at the new home. It doesn't make much difference to the small change of life that your husband is in jail; it's his absence that matters. Helen and I worked together, and she didn't spare herself. We were continually consulting and deciding. It wasn't a happy time for me; in this ebb of disaster I was so often trying and failing to penetrate to her thoughts.

She had become inscrutable again, and I tasted the irony of it. For here was I, dubbed by the easy phrasemongers as "analytical," and with all my sympathy, with all my penetration, I could only surmise vaguely. I dare say she was simple enough. She was not of the kind that would display emotion, explore

the situation. The prolonged debauch of egoism was not in her line.

I felt sometimes that it would have been far better and simpler if Marmaduke had died. His work in the world seemed over, and it hadn't been much, unless we count the getting of his children. He would be young still when he came out of jail, but a future for him was hardly conceivable. What would he do? I had a vision of him—it was a kind of low-down inspiration—as handy man about the garden. I could imagine his sinking gently into such a job. Helen's husband! And we should play up to him and take him at his full value and something over. To himself he would be justified, no doubt, by his wit and his mental activities generally. It is only the abashed that fail.

Helen was loyal, but what was it, what was it precisely, I asked myself, that she was loyal to? Perhaps she had not deserved a marriage of exalted sympathies; perhaps she couldn't have sustained her part in that. She was made to be a helpmate, and in this, it seemed, she had failed; it might not be her fault, but she had failed. Or had she? Perhaps the trial was to come. She was one of the women who persist in a simple conception of duty, and through the years and in spite of severance she would wait. She was not one to harry a husband into the straight and narrow way; she might not even save him from sloth and selfishness. Now Marmaduke must recede in her thoughts, until, years hence, his resurrection loomed

before her. Then he would take his place again. She wasn't an egoist; she wasn't a free woman.

It was strange for her to take up the Darley life after a long interval closed in disaster. The personnel of the place had not changed greatly, and she was received by her friends with a chastened eagerness. There was no question of the cold shoulder; the sins of the husband were not to be visited on the wife. You could believe that the ladies had adopted a policy, for they "called" almost in a body and they exercised miracles of tact. Helen did not deny herself to them, but generally she did not return the calls.

She would sometimes talk to the more intimate of these old friends about Marmaduke. I have heard her and have reflected in some humility that such confidences had not been common between her and me. Perhaps she believed that all was understood between us; perhaps she gave to these ladies a mere case. In a situation such as hers you must, sooner or later, formulate a case. The flux of events must be controlled, the statement must be plausible. Marmaduke's figure could never be made heroic, but it could be shorn of unbecoming trappings. And I think it was fine and loyal of her to insist on him, on his reality, on a future that contained him; she rejected the alternative of a stony silence. She was not unhappy, for she had her children, she had household affairs to control, and my comforts and interests to consider. You may expend a noble energy in making frocks for your baby.

Yes, we were more than tolerated; it might have been a virtue or an engaging trait to have a forger in the family. Even our good Broomhead, the conspicuous, the immaculate Broomhead, of whom we used to make such fun, had come to me in the early days of our trouble to ask if there was anything he could do. I didn't know that there was, but he pressed the point. "Anything!" he cried, "anything!" And then he added the remarkable qualification: "That is to say, anything in reason."

How Helen and I laughed over that! I think it was our first unbridled laugh together since disaster had overtaken us. And Broomhead contributed even more to our gaiety when he was nominated by one of our local wags as chairman of the Lecture Committee. For it was determined that Darley should have its course of lectures, and as a literary man I was called in to assist. Broomhead's strong point was that the lecturers must wear evening dress; there had once been lectures in Darley without this amenity. He was capable of calling it faultless evening dress or even The Evening Dress of an English Gentleman. The war has interfered with us in many ways, but in none more unfortunately than in relaxing, slurring over, "indeed, I may say, flouting" those civilizing observances which distinguish us from the beasts and the lower-middle class. We had been reprehensively lax, and now Broomhead cowed us into a positive regulation.

I was commissioned to induce my old friend Leygate to give one of the lectures. It certainly wasn't worth his while for the small fee we could offer, but

I wanted to see him again and he was ready enough to come. Leygate is not one of those whom prosperity has spoiled, and, indeed, I don't think it does often spoil people of the right sort. He admitted to me that his lecture would not be quite the first time on any stage, but of course that didn't matter to us. The subject offered and accepted was Ballads, and Broomhead approved highly of this. He determined to organize what he called musical illustrations and, so to say, make a night of it. Leygate was a learned enthusiast in the Border Ballads, and to some of us his lecture was extraordinarily interesting. But I shall never forget his aspect of bewilderment when Broomhead, his chairman, asked him kindly to resume his seat for a few minutes, and a lady, with her accompanist, tripped up to the piano. Then she struck up something to the effect that "They say I may marry the laird if I will," and the piano jingled accordingly; I believe that it is a drawing-room song of the 'eighties or thereabouts, for Broomhead had taken some trouble to secure "old" ballads. I was in the front row, and Leygate, whose "What's this?" had been unheard or disregarded, looked down upon me over his spectacles in startled inquiry. I think my life was endangered by the strangulation of laughter, and I felt Helen shaking on the bench beside me.

Presently Leygate was permitted to resume, but his lecture was punctuated from time to time by these so-called ballads. He is a humorist and when he had got the hang of the thing he took it all in good part; but it went far towards making nonsense of the lec-

ture when an impassioned quotation from "The Twa Corbies" or "The Wife of Usher's Well" was followed by some lisping irrelevance.

We had our laugh out when Leygate came home with us. He told us that Broomhead had assured him they all felt he had done his best, and I think he was rejoicing in an addition to his repertory of good stories. For he was a great repository of these, and he liked good gossip almost as well. We sat late over the fire that night as he talked, while I listened, of the London set he knew and their doings and misdoings. I like gossip, though I don't like it all detraction or of failure and disaster. And, provincial that I am, I want the people I admire to lead decent lives. Perhaps I mean humdrum, circumscribed lives, and my ideals are not good enough for them; they aspire to something nobly exalted above conventional behaviour. I rebelled at this tale of faithlessness, of divorce, of the restlessness that is ostensibly a search for the ideal. The women flit from husband to lover; they seek, it may be, a deeper affinity. But the men have more chances, for they don't grow old as fast.

"The gross fact is," I said, "that the wife has grown plain or the husband dull."

"And mustn't such facts be reckoned with?" said Leygate.

I went on another tack. "I am here," I said, "in a rather curious relation to some of the people about me. I'm a sort of literary man, and I suppose that my sympathies are, roughly, yours. That means that I'm considered a bit queer. Some of my neighbours

feel that I'm not quite their sort. They're afraid that I may put them in a book—or they're afraid I won't. Many of them are a little shy or guilty with me, because they haven't read my books or can't make anything of 'em. And yet, though I'm partly in your camp, I'm with them too. I've a forger for a son-in-law, but that's irrelevant; they're very much interested in the fact, and they accept it magnanimously. Yes, Leygate, magnanimously, for forgery here, in a commercial community, isn't just an interesting case for psycho-analysis. Yes, I'm a provincial, and I like the provincial virtues. We stick to husbands or wives here. Faithfulness is very much a matter of course. If our lives are not sensitive and brilliant together we do become, deeply and pathetically, friends. You'll say we're not alive; that we're sunk in a puritanical stupor."

"I don't know that I should say that," said Leygate.

"Is the state of things that you describe satisfactory to you?"

"Perhaps I've given you an exaggerated notion of it," he said. "I've been trying to make your flesh creep, I suppose. There are yet a few happy couples. And, mind you," he went on, "these people of whom we speak are not negligible. They're not the lewd froth——"

"I know," I interrupted eagerly. "That is the point. They're artists and poets whom the most straitlaced of us must respect. They have ideals of the intercourse of men and women. They've spiritual

needs and they don't stand still. But they're cruel. I tell you they're cruel. They can leave their mates to misery. Their comradeships are shallow. For the sake of that spiritual need they'll tear up by the roots. But there are no roots."

Leygate said: "There are cases in which it is impossible to go on. And, without disrespect to your friends, I'd say that there are societies of sharper-edged, more sensitive people than the ladies and gentlemen who sang these pretty songs to-night. There's a dull kind of faithfulness that doesn't matter much."

"But it's human to be faithful," I said. "It represents deep needs."

"If you're going to make divorce harder——" he began.

But I interrupted again. I hardly gave the poor man a chance. "I don't want it harder," I said. "I'd have it easier."

"But, my dear fellow, how——"

"I want divorce easier, and less divorce," I said.

"You want both the cake and the ha'penny," said he.

But I held to that. I wouldn't have people condemned to one another against their wills. I wanted the freedom of the spirit, and I wasn't without faith in the spirit.

"You want to have a fashion in faithfulness," he said sarcastically. "Don't think I want the world like a hen-run. But you mustn't lay on the spirit a burden greater than it can bear."

And then, at last, we came to Helen, who had been

in my thoughts all the time. I told him I had once been with her to see "A Doll's House," and she had been mightily excited, and thought it fine and illuminating. And then, as we came home in the train she frowned in meditation, and at last she said, "Daddy, if it had been me I suppose I should have come creeping back again. How could she be herself without those children?"

"I admire your daughter, Daunt," said Leygate.

"I suppose she would be a mere barbarian to your London lot?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" he said. "We like various kinds. And perhaps we should be a bit more liberal than you are here to that poor devil, your son-in-law."

"Would wives stick to such-like husbands with you?" I said.

"Really, Daunt, we're talking as though we were in different worlds. Stick to—well, a forger might have more chance than a bore." He got up to go to bed. He reflected, eyeing me. "You're not a man to be offended," he said. "I'm curious. I'm interested. That son-in-law of yours now. For aught I know he may be a fine fellow astray, a man worth redeeming. But if he's a mere wastrel, a criminal out of jail, do you mean to tell me that you want her to stick to him? You want her to be faithful? Faithful to what? If that other fellow—what's his name?"

"Antony Derwent."

"If Derwent came and she said Yes and she and her babes went off with him to a happy life—let's say in Canada—would you stand in the way?"

"Not for a moment," I said.

"But your ideals would be shattered," he said. "You'd think her unfaithful?"

I laughed at that. I knew something of the faithfulness that was not at the mercy of waning sex. "The question doesn't arise," I said.

And Leygate grumbled on about Antony and the type of the faithful dog. "Of course," he said, "if your young forger is amusing and has decent habits and won't do it again——" and then he recalled that in the war it was reckoned poor form to court an absent soldier's wife, "and I'm not sure," he said, "that it isn't as bad when the man's in prison."

We sank back on platitudes. We agreed that there are types and types, that all kinds go to the making of a world.

I led him to a picture in my room. It was a drawing of night in Glasgow and the artist had given it a fanciful title: "The Sleep of the Provinces."

"What do you read into it, then?" he said.

And I couldn't tell him explicitly. "The man had had a passion for Glasgow" ("Is it possible?" interjected Leygate), "his native town" ("Ah!" he said), "and now from London he looked back and it was not with scorn. If he renounced it was wistfully."

"Ah!" said Leygate again and then, as it seemed irrelevantly: "A fine creature; a fine creature."

Chapter 18

IT is in intimacies that we realize our loneliness; we look for more and more in our lover, and when we are content the vision fades. Always I hankered after something more from Helen and yet I am the good father, the dear father. And the good grandfather too, with everything nice and normal. Helen and I became like old friends. I was helpful and she consulted me constantly about the children. Yet I've seen in her the wish for more—the wistful, baffled look of those who seek and never find. I can dip again into that romantic, passionate time when her womanhood dawned on me, for it is fresh in my memory and I shall never lose it. Yes, she is conscious of something that has gone, something that she has never had. The poor girl searches her heart and asks herself where she has failed. I reassure her as well as I can, for I dread the shadow of reproach between us. I was touched—nay, I was greatly moved—by a pathetic attempt to catch up with me. She began to read my books, to puzzle over them; she had joyful moments of agreement and appreciation; it seemed that we did draw closer. And I found myself considering her as I wrote and even making audience of her. Perhaps it will "humanize" me, as the critics might say; perhaps she will bring me success. It matters little. One tries and tries again for a place in the sun; and then, in acquiescence, seeks the shade.

In acquiescence, but perhaps with a certain grandiosity of gesture.

Helen and I tried not to humbug one another with sham agreements, for we had much in common. We marketed, we gardened, we lived a simple life together, we sought each other's company. Marmaduke was very much in our thoughts and I built some of my castles in Spain about him. I imagined him amongst us again and treated with respect. We should impose upon him a kind of responsibility. Randal and Antony would be his familiar friends. Did it mean that we should fool him to the top of his bent? I don't think so. If there was no other work for him he would have to clean the boots. I could imagine his taking to it with his little, humorous snigger. Helen would stand over him benignantly.

I suppose I am, after all, a sentimentalist. I am filled with admiration for the younger generation. They come athwart my prejudices sometimes, but Helen, Randal, Antony, seem so generous, so good. And Marmaduke becomes in my mind, sometimes, an heroic figure. He must suffer; I acquiesce in that. More than any of us he must suffer and endure. Perhaps to be a hero you must volunteer, but there are times when volition seems very little in this hard world. I think of Marmaduke and I could thank God for Helen and for all steadfast, merciful women.

On a quiet spring night I sat waiting for her child to be born. Once again I heard those harrowing cries of the woman in labour, feeling myself to be helpless, useless. I lost my sense of the still house, the reassur-

ing professionals; my emotions were deeply stirred. And then, once more, I heard that strange, querulous cry of a child born to joy or sorrow, and I knew that soon Helen would be happy. And constantly I was feeling glad that I had been a good father.

I talked to the tired doctor and learnt that the newcomer was a boy, making two of each kind in the family, and then we had a late, or early, cup of tea together. I was permitted to take a look at Helen sleeping quietly, and it should have calmed me, but I came down trembling and quivering; I am growing old. I was too much excited to go to bed, and so I took down Conrad's *Youth,* feeling that there was something in it that I wanted. And through the splendid romance of it I did penetrate to the austere conception that youth is for "the endeavour, the test, the trial of life." Helen's youth was going, and that seemed lamentable, but she had before her the years of strong, patient womanhood. She could not hoard her youth; she must spend it freely.

Old habits, old attitudes, persisted, and I must always feel toward her, protective. And, indeed, I am impelled to make the final, arrogant claim that Helen lives in me. No one has seen her with my eyes; no one has given her, as I have, an ideal, passionate love. It has been an unequal relation; she has been puzzled, inarticulate. In the fullness of her youth and life, in her motherhood, she is greater than I, but she cannot match me in devotion. She has hard and difficult days before her, and I would always be there to help and shield. It cannot be.

"O God, I shall die first—I shall die first!"

Marmaduke

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Chapter I

We Daunts were in a singular position. We lived comfortably enough in our villa at Darley with its half-acre garden, and if you must live near Manchester and like an environment of hills Darley is a good choice. Our household consisted of my daughter Helen, my son Randal, Helen's four children, our two maids and myself. There was a gap in it, and this made the singularity of the position; for Marmaduke Abney, my son-in-law, was in prison fulfilling his sentence of five years' penal servitude for forgery. I suppose there must be many families with a member absent on some such business, but few of them live in red-brick villas in good suburbs. Our friends and neighbours had been considerably taken aback by the catastrophe, but when Helen and her children returned to my roof they had been very kind; they had competed with one another in implying that "it made no difference." I was conscious sometimes of being pointed out to people: "You see that man? He's got a son-in-law who's doing five years." And I would straighten my back and try to look calm and dignified. I was treated with great respect, but I was a kind of inexplicable literary man; I never went to church unless at a funeral, and my books wouldn't make good Sunday-school prizes. We are liberal nowadays,

any of us might have an unsatisfactory son-in-law, and as to the poor children, we mustn't push the idea of heredity too far. Of course there had always been something just a little bit queer about the Daunts.

We had settled down to a happy, almost a humdrum life together. Randal's college days were honourably over, and he was with a Manchester barrister devilling, and hankering a little after journalism; Helen was occupied with her children. She had few friendships, or didn't pursue them, and we had lost the custom of inviting people. My old devotion to Helen, one of the passions of my life, had sobered, it might seem, to friendship and affection. Potentially it was more than that, but you must beware of forcing the note of old passions; you may be staunch to a person, hardly to a passion. I grow old, and I would not be dull and blunt. The old man may make his claim for serenity, tenderness, delicacy; he has the doubtful asset of experience; he may aspire to the bird's-eye view.

Helen waited calmly, tending her children. We all waited; every one is waiting for indefinite events, but a particular one was always in our minds. Even the children knew that some day Daddy was to come home and there would be great rejoicings. Helen did not say, "When our ship comes in," but "when Daddy comes home." Some day there must be explanations, and I could believe that, when the time came, Helen would not shrink from these, though she might give a bowdlerized, even a roseate version of Marmaduke's offence. There would be ultimate revelation, of course.

The children were taught to pray for him, for that mysterious absent Daddy whose name was always associated with coming joys. They couldn't realize much about him, for Randy, the eldest, was only eight, but they had had some little contact with other children's Daddies and so, perhaps, might devise vague images of him. And they had their game of Daddy Coming Home. Helen and I, hand in hand, watched them playing it. Randy assumed the principal part and it was for him to bring home gorgeous presents to his children. Somehow they managed to associate this with the presents brought by the Wise Men of the East to another child; the drama was of unsettled form. Presents, however, were the essential part of it, and long before Marmaduke came home Helen had made sufficient preparation against disappointment.

Helen had her pieties, in loyal succession to her mother, who had been her early passion, and on Sundays and occasions she would herd such of her children as were old enough to the children's service. I acquiesce in all this, as in the old days I acquiesced in Helen's confirmation, which was to her, I surmised, largely a matter of a new frock. I don't think my agnosticism or scepticism, or whatever it is, lost me much of her sympathy. And now the children's version of Christianity has become mild and liberal, I suppose; it is not, as it was in my day, gingered up with hell fire. Whatever may be the faults of this generation, it has had some concern for the happiness of children. Of course Helen gave me a free hand; she had no reserves, no suspicions; I told the young-

sters tales, I joined in their games, I liked my rôle of the genial grandfather. But one day Randy said: "What will you do when Daddy comes home?" It indicated a ruthless dismissal.

Chapter 2

The time approached; at last, at last it was at hand. Helen appeared calm, but I have a father's eyes, a lover's eyes. Calmness is not a state, it is a qualification; you can't be merely calm. She was filled with hopes, misgivings, with impulses and shrinkings. She said little, for she is a reticent person, occasionally blurting out things from the depths. We rarely talked of this intimate matter, yet I suggested to her that, though her case might seem to her a singular one, women have been separated from their husbands before. I feared she was nursing that singularity of what in her schoolgirl days she called "rotten luck." I invited her to an extended range of sympathies, sententiously improving the occasion. "Many poor women," I said, "are suffering as you suffer." "But I don't know them," she said, and I felt that class is a sad limitation.

Our neighbours wanted to be considerate, but they became shy of approach; I daresay we were difficult. It is difficult to segregate yourself from the world, to claim peculiar standards. Spiritual values cannot be estimated in terms of law, but a forger's a forger. Marmaduke doubtless had more charm than most forgers, but charm is a virtue that tarnishes.

The idea of Marmaduke's return was exciting, and yet I could regret that our quiet days were coming

to an end. He didn't form part of my scheme of life, he couldn't conceivably fit into our present life. Helen had been, as you say, all the world to me and then for a short space Marmaduke had been the tremendous, the harassing preoccupation. I wanted Marmaduke and I dreaded him. Helen had been the centre, the pivot, the ideal, the reality; and during these quiet years we had been happy together. Yes, I grow old, I begin to idealize security, serenity. I can but love with what I am.

The time narrowed to weeks, to days. Incredibly the day came. There had been preparations, the garnishing of a chamber. It was not Helen's. Was it her husband who would return to her or a stranger? She had four children—I think she dreaded, as any woman might, to bear more. The future was difficult. She had been a faithful wife. What did he expect?

I think she was deeply disconcerted by this return. It is impossible, after such an interval, to take up things where they were. And, indeed, the relations of husband and wife had been out of gear long before. She had forgiven, she had condoned, but the years had intervened. We were all in doubt; we didn't know what Marmaduke would be like and our own feelings were tentative, unexplored. The children were in high excitement, and that brought misgivings. What did they expect? Would they be disappointed? Marmaduke had been an erratic father and couldn't be depended upon for sentimentalism—hardly for geniality.

It was arranged that Helen and Randal should go

to the prison to meet him and bring him home. Randal told me afterwards that they were received by the Governor, who was very nice to them. He seemed to know all about them, but Randal thought he was a little startled by Helen; she wasn't a usual type to stand waiting by the jail gate. Randal found something of "thwarted gallantry" in his attitude, but benevolence prevailed. He shook hands with Marmaduke at parting and Marmaduke made a neat little speech of thanks for consideration. Randal confessed that he couldn't determine the proportions of sincerity and tongue in cheek.

Marmaduke was quiet, gentle, and pale, like a flower deprived of sun. He took Helen's hand and hesitated, but she threw her arms round him. Randal and the Governor chatted for a while apart. Randal said that Marmaduke seemed strangely childlike and on the railway journey he looked out of the window in ecstasy. Once he said: "What's the point in keeping me from this?" Randal didn't feel like discussing the penal system. I wanted him to say something more about Helen, but I found it difficult to frame a question. I didn't like to say: "How did they get on together?" though that is what I meant when I said "Helen?" —Randal understood, though. "She stuck close to him," he said; "she might have been forcing herself upon him." To my implied interrogation he said: "Oh! I don't know, I don't know. It's too soon to say anything yet. We're all in a bit of a dither."

Chapter 3

THEY arrived by one of the crowded evening trains and Randy and I went to meet it. The boy thought he would know his father, but he wasn't sure, and was anxious about it. Like the riddle-guessers who desire a hint, he asked what kind of a hat his father would wear. I couldn't tell him, and began to wonder whether he would wear the suit in which he had been arrested. I recalled seeing some discharged prisoners with horribly creased and rumpled clothes. I didn't know that Helen had thought of this and that they took with them a decent overcoat and a soft hat.

The people poured out of the train and presently we saw him advancing between Helen and Randal. I think the news that he was coming had leaked out, and I was conscious of discreet movements, side-glances, guarded inspection. Little Randy started to run, and hesitated shyly. Before we got to them one man intercepted Marmaduke and shook hands with him. It touched my emotions and yet I resented it; I think I had a childish desire to greet him first. And thinking of it afterwards I couldn't make up my mind whether it was fussy of Burton or humane.

Randy got up to them and stopped in front of his father. Marmaduke stared at him, and it was not till Helen said something to him that he gave rather

a perfunctory tap to the boy's head. I imagine he was finding things very difficult and that he stiffened in self-defence. I got him by the arm and we fell behind. We were the last group to leave the station.

That paleness was very striking, and he looked older. He was strange to me, but he was coming back; speech and gesture were building him up again. I said something about this and he replied: "Yes, I've only my old bag of tricks."

Randy was asking whether old Sam, the out-porter, would bring up the luggage. Marmaduke rapped out: "What luggage?"

"Yours," said Randy.

"I've no luggage," said Marmaduke; "people don't have any when they drop from the sky."

"I thought you came by the train."

"Yes, but before that I had dropped from the sky."

"It's unusual," said Randy judicially.

We remembered now that Randy was in the way, as the hamper of presents for the children was concealed in bushes near the garden gate. So he was hustled into the house and the position was explained to Marmaduke. He was now to make his formal entry armed with these presents for the children; presents from that dim country whence he came. I had a moment's anxiety. He took two or three quick paces ahead of us, his hands clenching, his body stiffening. It might have been that he was going to be impracticable, morose. We didn't know what he would do; hardly what he was like. Helen took his arm reassuringly and yet doubtfully. The fellow was so sen-

sitive and we feared to be emphatic; we were abashed before him. It was difficult to be natural. Had we made a mistake in thrusting these presents upon him, in playing this note for him? But he thanked us. "Awfully kind and thoughtful," he said, and it was a relief. He took the hamper from us and he played up wonderfully. Soon he had the children shouting about him, showing and flourishing their presents. It was a grand realization for them of the doubtfully expected. Randy alone, though joining loyally in demonstration, appeared a little sceptical and wanted to know whether old Sam had brought the presents. Then he said: "Where've you been, Daddy?"

It stopped the fun. The children were listening, we were waiting; we left Marmaduke to it; expecting some variant of the descent from the sky. He and Randy gazed at one another but he didn't hesitate long. He said, "I've been in prison."

Helen started and would have spoken, but I touched her hand.

Randy's eyes were goggling. He said: "But wicked people go to prison."

"I was wicked," said Marmaduke, "but I'm not, now."

Randy said: "Oh, you're good now?"

"Daddy's good," said Mary.

"He's very good," said Helen.

"As good as you?" asked Mary.

"Yes, quite."

"No, not as good as your mother," said Marmaduke.

"As good as granfer?" said Randy.

Randal intervened: "About as good as me."

"That's very good," said Mary politely.

"Is prison nice?" asked Randy.

"Very unnice," said Marmaduke.

"Rotten luck!" said Randy.

Marmaduke turned to us. "I shall get some fun out of this chap," he said.

Then Helen put it to them that Daddy didn't like to talk about it and that the subject was closed. The children filed out looking solemn.

Randal clapped Marmaduke on the back: "Well done!"

"You can't do impossible things well," said Marmaduke gloomily.

And then he went on: "It's curious to come back to action. Now I've got to do things, to decide things. I've thought about this day and what I should do scores of times, hundreds of times. You want something to think about when you are trying to sleep at night. I've concocted brilliant speeches, I've said beautiful things to Helen and the children. Sometimes I made myself cry—they were so beautiful. I'm easily affected. One forgets all this when the time comes; one does middling things. It's different, you're all different from what I thought. Have I changed much?"

He stood squarely before us and we considered him. He was rather a small man, holding himself with some alertness. On a day of our early acquaintance with him there had been some discussion as to

whether he should be described as peculiar or distinguished. His features were not striking, but nearer to sharp than to blunt, his eyes bright and rather restless. One had thought of him as a lively man relapsing to melancholy; now his melancholy seemed more constant, though we were often to see him light up. Something had passed over his face, a partial erasure; colour had been withdrawn.

Helen and Randal assured him that he had changed very little. He waited for me to speak.

"You are slipping back into yourself," I said. "The air, the sun, will put you right."

"The prison greyness!" he said. "It's a grey place. Greyness is the tragic thing, not black. Or rather," he continued, with a pedantical touch of his old fancifulness, "there's something worse than tragedy. I must tell you about it some day."

"Talk of it or not, as you like, my boy," I said.

"I don't know," he cried; "I don't know whether to pretend it isn't there, to leave it aside, an undigested lump of horror, or to assimilate it, to make you all feel it. For I must live very much in you, in you people around me. I've longed for you, I've longed to be with you. I've been numb, and I feel the blood creeping through my veins again. Don't let us pretend —and yet I know I shall avoid it instinctively and you'll all be so infernally tactful. Yes, I think I'll keep off it with the children. And yet there's that little Randy, thinking, thinking."

We had tea with the children round the dining-room table. There was a kind of comfort, of snugness, in

the party, but presently the children began to irritate him as they gained confidence. He was accustomed to such deep silences; they broke upon his habit. The habit might be hateful but it had subdued him. This merry clamour of a family was more than he could bear. Helen, watching him, withdrew the children as soon as she could.

And then we found time hanging heavy on our hands. We sauntered in the garden, but he took little interest in that, though he approached the palings sometimes to gaze fixedly up or down the road. When anybody passed, he withdrew. He seemed to have lost pleasure in smoking and he talked spasmodically, hardly listening to what we said. We dined rather pleasantly and I brought out a bottle of port, but he didn't finish his glass. Helen hadn't much to say, and one didn't know whether she wished for chances of intimacy, whether she and Marmaduke should be left together as is the way with lovers. We felt ourselves to be unpractised, in difficult circumstances. Randal kept us going with newspaper topics till Marmaduke said impatiently: "I know nothing of all this." Then he passed Randal the walnuts in quite a friendly way.

After dinner Antony Derwent came in. He and Marmaduke met without embarrassment and with a fair appearance of heartiness. Antony was still very much the handsome, charming lad of those distant days when he was Helen's suitor. He had not succeeded there, but he seemed marked for success in life. It was strange to see them all together again.

Yes, I had wanted Helen to marry him, to go the smooth, suburban way; but she left the good, safe fellow for the uncharted Marmaduke who sat here darkly smiling. I met Randal's eyes with understanding. We were in it, but we were spectators too. I watched them—Antony's simple, friendly bearing, Helen grave but hardly anxious, Marmaduke enigmatic but occasionally voluble. And I liked it all; it seemed, at least, that the curtain had risen on an interesting combination.

Marmaduke broke suddenly across some trivial talk. "That forgery," he said, "was a trumpery affair. Nobody was hurt. What they did to me showed a lack of proportion. I was wronged. But what is the effect of all this repression? Has it changed me, steadied me, given me stamina? It will be interesting to find out. I admit that if I wanted to forge again I should have that prison in mind. I wonder whether I shall ever get there again?"

Randal said: "Of course you won't. We wouldn't let you."

"What!" said Marmaduke. "Am I to be watched, dragooned, held fast? Am I not free yet? What *are* you going to do with me?"

"You must have a good holiday first," said Helen.

"A holiday?" he said. "Nothing to do? Is that what I want?"

Antony suggested that he should "take up golf."

"You're a good chap, Antony," said Marmaduke. "You mean well." And then he began to laugh. "Do you remember that fatal morning when you

wanted me to bolt in a motor-car? To Appleby, because you'd heard it was a pretty place! I've chuckled over that in my cell."

"I know I'm a bit of an ass, but I wanted to help," said Antony. When he had gone, Marmaduke spoke of him as an amiable bore. It wasn't necessary. Antony was our friend, and had nearly been more than that to Helen. But Marmaduke, it seemed, was on edge; he was always changing. "Oh, a very good fellow, of course," he said; "and so are you all. You're good people. I feel that; at least I see it. My feelings are all out of order. I've been living at high pressure to-day. I show up badly. I'm insolent and ungrateful. A bad start. I'll go to bed." He paused before Helen, bowed slightly and said "Good night." She stared after him, frowning, as he went out.

Chapter 4

YES; what were we to do with him? He hadn't initiative, though he made comic suggestions. He proposed to become boot-boy and knife-polisher, and when Helen told him we used rustless knives he said that half his occupation was gone. He condescended to be facetious. He got into the way of coming out to help me in the garden and he worked in a fashion that was sometimes dogged and oftener desultory. He wasn't sullen; he talked a good deal. He told us that for part of his time he had helped the prison cook, but that he couldn't induce him to experiment, to take pride in his work. "I told him," said Marmaduke, "that cooking began where he left off, and he threatened to report me to the Governor. I grant that you can't get much delicacy out of a trough." Then they tried him at one or two handicrafts, but he didn't get on well and they made him a clerk. "But always back to the cell, always in shadow. 'Freedom' had been merely a word, but I brooded on it till it was an obsession. And now I'm wondering whether there is any freedom. Am I free?" He said that the worst of prison life is that it eliminates morality. "There's no choice. You're reduced to that old crude form of Christianity. You are good because you want to avoid punishment."

Marmaduke was shy about going outside the gar-

den because people would shake hands with him. They were very kind, they were tactful in a fearfully obvious way. He had fits of gloom and then he would wake up and make fun of it all. Mr. Willink insisted on the fiction of his having "been abroad" and hoped he would settle down now. "To be condoled with by the Village Idiot!" said Marmaduke. And Miss Hempstall had asked him to tea. "I think it was gallant of her. If I forged, why shouldn't I murder: I'm sure she was relieved when I said I wasn't up to it."

I suggested that these were trifles. "I know, I know," he said, "but I'm surrounded—you all surround me—with a dreadful kindness. It's like what you extend to a dying man. You're all waiting for something that doesn't come, that can never come. I can be only what I am and you want a miracle. Every man is either on the up grade or the down grade; I'm on the down."

Randal, who was present, said impatiently: "Then change to the up."

"Randal insists on a tonic," said Marmaduke, grinning. "The first harsh word!"

We fell into a kind of routine; we wouldn't let Marmaduke become a sluggard, and he conformed fairly well to the family habits. He pottered about, he was obliging, he did odd jobs. There was a discussion about keeping hens and the possibility of this becoming an industry under his management. Hens! We were all jocular about it and Marmaduke discussed the project with grave irony. He said that hitherto

hens had failed to inspire our affection, but that intensive study of them—and so on. He was always adept at evading issues. When you asked him for a suggestion, he would say that he should like to be a mediæval monarch. "A bit of a blackguard but a patron of the arts. Little tricky beauties and magnanimities. Gestures. That's the kind of thing I could do pretty well." Randal suggested that he might become a decorator. Helen regarded him sombrely; he seemed to have become one of her children, and a difficult one. Occasionally he was sober, reasonable, grateful.

He had his periods of abasement, of self-examination, of analysis that was very much a rending of himself in pieces. Why not turn him out and be done with him? He would be rash before the children. "What d'you say to turning me out, Randy?" And with some caution Randy said no. They had accepted him, but his withdrawals puzzled them. He wasn't always ready, he was capricious and sometimes they waited rather sadly for the occasion. But he could be charming, thrilling. I was with him one evening in the bedroom shared by Randy and little Richard. He was talking nonsense to them and they didn't want him to go; they were tucked in for the night but they wanted to prolong the day and here the best of it was precariously before them. It was a chilly spring evening and Marmaduke wanted to go downstairs, as he was cold. But they bombarded him with questions devised to delay; they became dolorous with "Don't go, don't go." Then Marmaduke said: "Tell you what! Shall I warm myself by getting into a pas-

sion?" And he did it. He produced a great, fantastic passion with writhings, clutchings, terrific gestures. They were delighted and a little frightened. He kept it up till with a childish gratification he said: "I'm warm now." We all laughed rejoicingly and Dicky said: "Do it again."

I was impressed by the performance. He startled me and I had the ridiculous idea that he could play Othello. There are latent abilities, talents, passions in us. We don't try ourselves out; we are not, as they say of the athletes, extended. We mustn't acquiesce in Marmaduke's failure.

The boys often asked him if he wasn't cold, suggesting passion, and sometimes, but not often, he would give a repetition. Mary and Lucy heard about the turn and wanted it too, but Marmaduke wouldn't. He said that girls were another matter and he instituted whisperings, secrets, confidences, with them. I've seen him the good, charming father; I've seen him pathetically humble with his children. I told Helen that he was justifying himself and "Of course!" she said. It was an echo of that old pride. She had married him. I wasn't sure sometimes when he was puzzling and snaring his children whether he was the best or the worst of fathers. I discussed it with Randal, who was generous. "He makes me feel merely intelligent," he said.

In the right mood Marmaduke accepted gaily facetious suggestions about his career and would enlarge on them. He would be an entertainer at a holiday hotel, the preposterous functionary who teaches you

how to enjoy yourselves; the stage was mentioned, of course, but he said it was too obvious, that we must think of that last. And then there is "the bush, or diggings, or something of that kind. Any incompetent can make an heroic gesture, but the thing is to keep it up like a postman. One could do the Sidney Carton flourish, you know—'The Only Way.' That old rubbish has a grain of truth in it. But every man ought to have a handicraft to save him from despair. Some odd, out-of-the-way thing I might do well. I think I might make a good funeral conductor. Dignity, sadness as a fine art, a shade of irony. Has he ever been used as a musical theme? What subtlety you'd want! You must give the man a soul of sorts."

One day he went to Manchester. He said he was going to have a look round, though we didn't know what that meant. He came back gloomy. What had he done? What could he do? He told us that he had determined to call on several business acquaintances to sound the possibilities of a return to his old line of work. He found it very difficult, and at last he took the extraordinary step of visiting his former employers, the people who had prosecuted him. It was rash, but Marmaduke said he wanted to know more about human nature. It appeared that Mr. Hucklow, "that hoary old bandit," had retired, but he saw Mr. Birchin. "You remember Galsworthy's play?" said Marmaduke. "The forger comes back from jail and his young employer shakes hands with him. There's always a round of applause from the audience. Very natural; I feel like applauding, but I've that stupid

notion that you mustn't applaud from the heart. Well, Mr. Birchin didn't shake hands. He watched me with suspicion. I asked him if he had seen Galsworthy's play—'Justice.' He said he hadn't and seemed to resent the question. What can you do with a man like that? I wanted to argue with him that my punishment was excessive, that there was a kind of balance owing to me. He ought to have been interested in this, but he was cold and disagreeable. I suggested that he should draw up a detailed estimate of the consequences of my crime, of the harm done, the people hurt. My idea was to put this against my torture and try to strike a balance. Of course, there's the point that imprisonment may have improved me, made me a better member of society. If he had advanced that I could have countered with 'Then why not give me a job?' Pretty cunning, wasn't it? I could be eloquent about the whole thing with the right audience. But this fellow chilled me. He really wouldn't listen. What did I want? He got up, glaring and watchful. And then I realized that he suspected I might have a pistol and want to shoot him. What a lark! So I made a hasty movement toward a hip pocket—I haven't one—and he came rushing at me."

Marmaduke made a good comic scene of it; he made us all laugh. He had succeeded in making a fool of Mr. Birchin, but to do that with your possible employer isn't the way to get on in the world. For I suppose that Marmaduke actually had the idea that he might get taken on again. Or had he? He had

gone to Manchester and he must do something. He soon realized the hopelessness of his task. Waywardness, adventurousness, curiosity, had taken him to the old firm, and the only result was an addition to the comic repertory. He made a burlesque version for the children which was a great success: "How Mr. Birchin went for Daddy's pistol." They did it among themselves when they couldn't get him. He added extravagances and they were always acceptable. I had a glimpse of him as the Inimitable; so the great Dickens used to call himself.

The visit to Manchester had no consequences; what could it have had? He made a few calls on acquaintances, but they didn't know what to do with him. "I think they wanted to be decent," he said. "It hasn't made me a cynic. But how incompetent these fellows are socially! They can't rise to a new situation; they can't even be natural. They were all in a hurry to explain that they had nothing for me. It wasn't because I was a forger—or, as a man put it, 'on account of anything that has occurred'—but because business was so bad. It appears that everybody is overstaffed. Useless! Useless!"

I thought it rather fine of Marmaduke to have made the experiment. And yet he spoke as though the experience was an end in itself. I didn't like his air of: That's done. That's closed. And yet perhaps it was.

Chapter 5

And then Marmaduke set out to look for work. We thought it was a joke; it could only be a joke. He insisted upon it and he positively set out in the shabbiest clothes he could muster—they were mainly mine—and carrying a brown-paper parcel. He wouldn't have a rucksack because it would make an amateur of him; he took a little money. We had no difficulty in demonstrating that there was no solution this way, that the expedition was an absurdity. Yet Helen, who had been dejected by the proposal, came round to his side. She told Randal and me that he was getting depressed, that he must do something, try something, make a diversion. And of course, if he could take it as an outing, a recreation, there was no harm in it. But what, at the best, did he expect to do?

He assured us that jail had hardened him, that in this early summer weather it was delightful to sleep in a dry ditch, that he wanted to test himself. "We don't do it enough," he said, "we live and die and never find out about ourselves. Think of an incensed God asking what you've done with your talents! You're all for arranging how to live, for making things safe, not for living. We don't explore, we don't strive, we don't put in the last ounce." So he said good-bye, kissed the mystified babes and Helen and set off res-

olutely. It seemed about as real as Mr. Micawber's emigration, and I thought of running after him to suggest this, as he might have appreciated it.

Picture post cards came from several towns or villages addressed to the children, and I received a card with the word "Working" and his initials on it. We couldn't make out the post-mark and we didn't know what he was up to. There was a long pause, and then he came home. He had been away about five weeks.

If it was a failure, it wasn't a ludicrous one. He had actually got some employment on a farm and had continued in it for two or three weeks. "I earned money on the land," he said with a slightly burlesqued pride; "I wanted to prove that I could support myself." I didn't like to remind him that he had gone away with five pounds and had spent it. Where he did score a clear success was in the account of his adventures to the children. It began moderately; there was even some realism; but he began to exaggerate. He soon got to dragons and princesses, and he did it all so well that I wondered whether he couldn't write books for children. Whenever he did anything clever or distinguished I began to assess it in terms of a possible career. He gave to us but scrappy accounts of his adventure. I thought I detected some fiction even here, and on a question he cried, "Oh, don't pin me down!" For a moment he was almost hysterical. Helen spoke to me about him, forestalling my protests, it would seem. She had excuses, justifications. The burden of them was: "You like 'fun.' Well, he's fun." I agreed eagerly enough. I said:

"We've been dull all these years without him." She was absurdly grateful; and yet I asked myself whether she still loved him. It sounds queer, but I think her love had become very much a sense of responsibility. She mothered him, she championed him, he was her care, her cause. And the fellow could be appealing. The fine flush of her love was past; I think she didn't want his embraces. She wanted a steady, affectionate friendship and she knew it was impossible.

Marmaduke made a confidence to Randal, who passed it on to me. At the farm where he had been employed he had made an excursion into the sinister-idyllic. There was a girl who was something between the innocent maiden and the hussy, and it wasn't very clear whether we were to regard Marmaduke's departure as an escape or a desertion. It was certain that there was material for a divorce, and Randal and I agreed that Helen must know. He had told Marmaduke so, and Marmaduke agreed, but said that he must wait for the proper opportunity; I think he considered that the communication must be led up to by appropriate emotions. Ultimately I told Helen myself, and her attitude was self-reproachful. Since his return she had not been in the full sense a wife to him, and so she had encouraged him to evil courses. Duty! Duty called to her. I protested with some distaste. She had done a good deal in the way of duty; she had her four children. Even in civilized life there is a frightful inequality, for the wife tires before the husband. And he has his rights and she her duty!

We haven't got formulas yet to deal with this; we are all in a muddle; one party would be rigid and the other would let loyalties and affections go. But to Helen I said: "You are free."

I recalled those old days when I hated to see the young men come about her. My passion for Helen was tender, protective. Ah! That old romance of my life! It had faded? At least it had changed. There was a great and enduring affection. Romance is not enduring matter, and one would be authentic, sincere. I was tender and protective still, but the world seemed blunter than it used to be. Helen was a wife and a mother, and the side of her life that I saw was very much customs and formulas; she had never been articulate. It had come to this, and it was useless to baulk at it. Women are not porcelain; they must suffer, fade, decay. Why shouldn't she go on bearing children? It was her work in the world, and she was an admirable mother. I found myself considering mere ways and means; the difficulties of education, the expenses of public schools. We hadn't very much money, and a larger family would mean some concession in the gentilities.

I knew that Helen wasn't free. She would forgive to seventy times seven before she sued for a divorce. To me Marmaduke was an immense difficulty, a perpetual obsession, but he was Marmaduke. I remembered that in those old days he had said: "I know nothing of the future." Helen had replied: "I take the risk." She was born to help, to comfort, to endure. And now the position was beyond her, as it

was beyond all of us. What was the poor lad to do? He couldn't be our bootboy all his life. I must make efforts, I must write to friends, force locked doors, accomplish the impossible.

And then we had that horrid jar when he reeled in among us covered with mud and calling out in a thick voice: "An experiment. Merely an experiment."

He swayed and sat down suddenly. Helen, Randal and I watched him. "Mark you," he said, "a burst like this is far better than soaking insidiously." He got through the difficult word slowly and carefully; he reminded me of a foreigner talking good English. "It's good for you to spend a little time in a ditch," he continued, "to experience humility. It isn't dignified? What's dignity?"

He looked at us, one by one, and I suppose he saw, or thought he saw, hostility. "Get on with your reproaches. Get on with them," he cried truculently and then, with an effort, he rose to his feet. Helen had been standing, and now she approached him. He shrank from her, and one almost expected him to put up an elbow. But she pursued him and then, amazingly, we saw her take him in her arms. All muddy and drunk she held him fast. He cried: "No, no!" He was shaken by sobs. "At my lowest," he said, "she takes me." And then he broke away. "It isn't fair," he cried; "I *have* to try. She won't leave me alone. Why don't you let me go down the hill, get it over? I'm no good. That's plain enough. Oh, I'll try. I will try."

There was a child's cry and she was off. Marmaduke quieted down. His reactions were ingenious; as usual he took refuge in gaieties of paradox. He began to talk of prohibition, he went on to Samurai and saints. "The idea of taking drunkenness out of the world! Damn these social reformers. Wine, beer, even whisky! Think of the idea of them, the tradition, the record, the fun, the evil, the good; what shall we do when everything's flat and virtuous? Ah, but I suppose the world's like a child sticking to its broken toys. And we must put away childish things. We must live in the spirit. But there's a lot to be done with the senses yet. Do you realize how much happiness there is in drink? I don't mean coffee and ginger-beer. Danger? Of course there's danger. What's a world without danger? Safety first? It isn't safety we want; it's zest. Why does Randal climb rocks? Because it's dangerous. Without that it would be tedious and stupid. Let's keep a few drunkards. You could put them in preserves like the wild beasts in Africa. Aren't there bird preserves? There's the ideal; the birds can fly away."

All was wrong, but we had rather an entertaining evening. Marmaduke wouldn't change his clothes; he said it was a penitential garb and must be endured for his soul's good. He was brilliant, or at any rate he made incursions upon our seriousness, which is to say that he made us laugh. Gradually he became sober, dull and sleepy. He roused himself to tell us that he had had a tragical idea. "It's a man who conquers himself, you know. He has struggled

against rashnesses, irritabilities, sins, and it seemed a losing battle. And then he gets command of himself, he gets peace and serenity. Where's the tragedy? Well, it occurs to him that he has merely become old and mild."

Helen watched him, occasionally glancing at us to see how we took it. The infatuated woman still had her pride in him. Her case was that Marmaduke was wonderful. Without that the poor girl was reduced to folly, convicted of an incredible choice. Randal and I were very ready with her to strain the idea of an essential, a palpitating life that is independent of any bourgeois success; we were even prepared for inroads upon bourgeois morality. And, of course, Marmaduke was the salient instance of it. He flouted the prudences and cautions; he was for the here and now. But somebody must take precautions. I think we were all heavy-hearted. Helen had her children, and I felt that I ought to get more out of them than I did. I recall telling her almost sharply that she drudged for them too much; that she was serving them, not living with them. I asked her if she told them tales—the younger ones? She blushed, admitting humbly that she rarely did so now. She said she wasn't very good at it. I think the children had slighted her efforts after their father came home. Some small attempts of my own had been taken calmly and even indulgently.

On that particular evening we had managed to keep the children out of Marmaduke's way; he hadn't asked for them. He stayed a little with Randal and me after Helen had gone, and he asked me what I thought

about his going to live in London. "The point is," he said, "that they have different values there. That is, the people I should get among have. A forger! How interesting! *Quel type!*"

"Do these societies, these coteries, really exist?" said Randal.

"I've business ability of a kind," said Marmaduke. "I should make a good secretary for a Decadent Club."

He went off, leaving Randal and me together. Randal was excited; I had been. I think that in my lassitude he perceived dejection, disapproval. Certainly he had many misgivings, but he was moved to stand up for his friend. I think he had felt something of a growing alienation and reacted from this. After all, he was very young. He implied some reproach to my Victorianism, respectability, convention. But in justice he had to recall that I had an honourable record that wasn't all in favour of moral rigidities. And I believed that my sympathy with Marmaduke was deeper than his. I said: "He half-believes the things he says, or believes them half the time." Randal nodded, but he said: "Sometimes he more than believes them. He's an artist." I was tired and unready for refinements. I saw things in terms of Helen and the children—the children, symbols of eternity. Poor little beggars! I thought I could deliver a lecture on responsibility. Also on "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But I was tired, I was old. I'm afraid I became pathetic.

When Randal complimented me on my extraordi-

nary elasticity I began to see some comedy in our scene. He was good enough to approve; I was keeping up my end remarkably well. The good fellow put his hand on my shoulder. Such a thing had never happened since he was a child. There was a moment's tenderness between us. It was unexpected, unsuspecting, embarrassing. Inexpert lovers are said to be clumsy in their kissing. It was, to me, very affecting. It is when you get help and sympathy that you feel how much you need them.

Randal was embarrassed too, I think, and he tried to carry it off with confidence. "Bravo! Bravo!" he said. "You're wonderful." I said: "Damn your impudence! Why shouldn't I be wonderful?" And I thought: What words we use! Have we been reading Henry James? But if you get your words right in emotion can there be much or genuine emotion? And can you analyse as you go on? Yes, if you have the critical habit.

We had had a good deal of emotion during the evening, and now it seemed that a little was left over; Marmaduke, then, had stirred us; his function was to make us live; to rouse, distract, inspire us. But Randal and I didn't know how to get any further; we stuck fast in respect and goodwill. He accomplished handsomeness. "Ah! You beat us," he said, "—your generation. You've grace and kindliness, and fortitude and all the good forms. We've more driving power, perhaps; we're going to effect some kind of change, but we don't quite know what." And we chaffed one another about raw, bleeding life; there

was some recapture of spirits. Then I mentioned Helen, and Randal's face fell. Our parting for the night had almost a studied casualness.

I saw Randal as a support, a refuge, a tower of strength. Yet I didn't think enough of him. That other poor boy was usurping his place in my mind. One's children should come first, and Marmaduke was hardly my child. Yet it seemed that he was part of my own life. And I want my own life. To live for my children is not enough. My life has an impetus of its own. Your children withdraw from you; they become mysteries. I've seen Randal and Helen conferring together, and I've withdrawn humbly. They have a right to their lives and I to mine. And yet there's no equality. Take them out of my life and the loss is irremediable; take me from them and there's a loss, but it's no great matter.

Chapter 6

THERE was always the question whether Marmaduke should, as he put it, face it out or become confidential bootboy. Randall one day mentioned the Trinity Club, to which Marmaduke used to belong, and Marmaduke told us of his recurring dream about it. When he was in prison he had, over and over again, found himself in the club and had realized with consternation that he wasn't a member. He did not recollect the forgery, but simply that he wasn't a member and must get out at once. And now he had had a variant of the dream. This time he was half-conscious of unreality, and as he left the club he encountered a member and walked up Mosley Street with him. He said to this man: "Were you at the Trinity Club today?" The answer was "Yes." Then Marmaduke said: "Was I there?"

"I see," Marmaduke assured us, "that psychology should be a refuge for a man like me. You cease to be a criminal when you take yourself psychologically; you're just an interesting phenomenon. I wonder how I should feel if I were actually in the club. Like a man in a dream?"

"You'd better come and try," said Randal.

"Do you mean that?" said Marmaduke.

Randal nodded. I thought it a gallant offer, for I could not conceive his wanting Marmaduke there.

Randal had his elements of revolt, even of assertiveness, but Marmaduke at the club seemed a fearfully uncertain quantity. He would take the lead, he might be outrageous. Yet Randal calmly proposed lunch there, and Marmaduke said reflectively: "I shall have to behave."

"Naturally," said Randal.

"On your account, I mean."

I intervened jocosely, "It might be desirable on general grounds."

Marmaduke said: "It's an interesting idea. It gives me something to think about. I shan't have a bad day."

Poor devil! It seemed, then, that he lived a day at a time. There was nothing to carry on from one day to another. One knows that feeling; the dreadful loss of impetus in one's life. The mood of dullness, of dejection, when nothing but stoicism is left. And Marmaduke didn't make a good stoic.

This idea of going to the club fascinated him. He talked about it for several days. "Could I stand it?" he said. "Could I walk into the smoking-room as though nothing had happened? Would there be a row? What a joke! Or would it be a tragedy? Am I not as good as anybody else now? I've worked off my wickedness, I'm purged of my iniquity. Why should you think yourselves better than I?"

He had grown rhetorical; he was already addressing the members of the club. He turned to Randal: "Do you really mean it?"

"Yes," Randal said.

"Then, I'll come."

I waited with some anxiety to hear the result. Looking over the garden palings I watched them mount the hill together in the late afternoon. They seemed listless, and they were not talking to one another. When Marmaduke saw me he brisked up a little. He called out: "We completed the programme." I turned to Randal: "Was he a good boy?"

"Very fair," Randal said.

They came up into the garden and we walked about the lawn. Marmaduke said: "There was a lot of damned hand-shaking. One did it, and others followed suit. It was ridiculous, because you don't shake hands at a club. Old Cust was the best. He nodded and growled as usual. I seemed to make everybody unreal and uncomfortable. Most of 'em were quite decent and trying not to look surprised. Some were scandalized and kept out of the way. They thought I should have appeared in a white sheet. The whole thing was perfectly futile. I'm no nearer anything. It was a good hot-pot. I think the cooking's better. Thanks, Randal."

He went into the house. Randal said that he had done nothing worse than wild talk. Nobody took him up. This discouraged him, and he became moody. On the whole, he had been merely endured. Randal was dispirited, and relieved to have the incident over.

We were apprehensive about a possible repetition of the "experiment." Randal and I had given him some plain talk on the subject, which he had taken humbly. Helen seemed to be particularly afraid of

the children seeing him when he wasn't at his best, but he would not be reckless when the children were about, though he might be fantastic. Watching him with them one day his gorgeous nonsense gave me again the idea that he might become an actor. I wondered what he would think about it and, expressing a half-jocular admiration, insinuated the idea. He affected to ridicule it, but he became thoughtful. He said that the actor is an egoist in chains; that he would act if they would let him do Hamlet, or Oswald in "Ghosts," or even the poet in "Candida." He would like to throw a veil of irony over the characters of solid worth, and he thought he could give a new reading of Hotspur. The idea had taken hold of him. He recited Othello's "Most potent, grave and reverend signiors" and we all thought he did it uncommonly well.

"But the passion of Othello?" I said.

"Ah! That I can do only in my mind."

I reminded him of his scene with the children when he represented passion in the abstract.

"Or was it rage?" he said. "I can be anything for a little while. I'm not a steady goer, a born official, a years of service man. I shouldn't do five years' penal servitude by choice. When there's a transmigration of souls, I suppose I shall be put back to butterfly."

But he went about thoughtfully, and I determined that something must be done. I would go and see Mr. Buckingham.

Chapter 7

I CONQUERED my distaste, I was firm with myself, and I went to see Mr. Buckingham. I don't know how he got that superb name; probably he fitted himself into it; I cannot believe that it came from his ancestors. He was theatrical agent, manager of touring companies, shareholder in theatres and cinemas. In manner he was meretricious and he had an appearance of tarnished grandeur; he struck you as being true to type. His acquaintance had been somehow forced upon me in the days when I wrote theatre notices and I had often taken some trouble to avoid him. Yet the fellow had a sort of large, theatrical tact. "I know, my dear fellow," he would say, "that I oughtn't to speak to you when I have an interest in this show, but I just want to point out—" and so on. He would offer to stand me a drink—"or perhaps you would rather stand me one. I appreciate your position."

He treated me, as he would have said, with distinction; he deferred to me, he insisted on my correcting his errors. He was ponderous with a vein of shrewdness. He coquetted with modernity in the shape of Shaw and Galsworthy; he didn't like them, but they were worth watching. It was one of his foibles that he must always be explaining why such a man as he

was not in London. He didn't make it very clear, but it redounded somehow to his credit and that of the provinces. I used to get on fairly well with him, having a quality somewhere between amiability and affability which would serve me until I got ruffled.

His office wasn't imposing and he thought it necessary to explain to me the absence of clerks, of plush and imposing accessories. It seemed that he specialized, rather, in rugged honesty. He was genial and offered cigars. I began to be amused at his presence, deportment, largeness of gesture and found myself playing up to him in half-conscious inflations. He made remarks of the "unexpected honour" kind, and I saw that he was eyeing me thoughtfully, ready for the defensive.

Of course he knew all about Marmaduke; everybody knew all about us. His mind was capable of a rapid inference, and I think he guessed what I wanted before I mentioned Marmaduke's name. When I did so he nodded thoughtfully with "Awfully sorry about it. Awfully sorry." He wasn't bad. I felt almost capable of liking him; perhaps the truth of it was that, being anxious to placate, I was grateful for anything like a concession. But I didn't like my job; I had to be confidential, to be friendly; it was no use half doing it. No; he wasn't bad. He was friendly and rather condescending. I hadn't anything to offer him except a damaged son-in-law. He was a man of the world, and this misfortune might have happened to any of us. "I mean t'say—I don't mean t'say—not to you or me, but t'some one—some one near and dear, eh?"

His diction was getting out of hand, but he meant well. He was not accustomed to express delicacies of feeling.

Presently he regained simplicity with "What is it you want?" I was wasting his time. I explained, as a friend, how difficult it was to place the boy. "And not a bad fellow, mind you," I said. "He's had his lesson. I'd be ready to go bail for him to any reasonable amount—charming fellow, and the point is I believe he's a born actor."

Mr. Buckingham gave an incredulous snort, and I realized that we were getting near his business manners. "Where did you see him act?"

I didn't like to say that it was in the nursery, to his children. I said that, of course, he was unpractised, that I founded my opinion on disjointed trifles and yet —casting aside scruples—I would pledge my reputation that he was an actor. He should do well, he might do wonders.

"Never thought you knew much about acting," said Mr. Buckingham.

I laughed cheerfully. "Well," I said, "when I start writing notices again I'll show you." And this was my unscrupulous cunning; I wasn't going to start again. He became thoughtful.

"What's your idea?" he said.

"That you should find him a job."

Buckingham laughed stiffly. "How can I do that?" he said, but I saw that he was withdrawn in thought. Presently he said: "D'you know Errall? P'raps he might do for Errall."

"Erral?" I said. "You mean——?"

"Must have heard of Errall," he said, "he's in your line."

"You mean the man who plays Ibsen?"

"That's him. Biggest fool in the profession."

Of course I knew about Errall; I had seen him act. His company had people of talent in it and they played masterpieces to empty houses till it became a mystery how they went on. Errall was a bad actor, and you asked yourself sometimes whether he wasn't a man of genius; such persistence as his suggested a Robespierre, a Parnell. His career was the most astounding pursuit of the ideal. He couldn't act, but he did act and produced an effect. He was extremely intelligent, and one wondered whether intelligence, devotion, connoisseurship couldn't some day hammer him into a great actor. I've fancied sometimes that the Irvings, father and sons, began stiffly and badly, but by will, labour and imagination beat their music out. I've written notices about Errall and his Company that I've fancied were worth reading. The man intrigued me, and his wife, who acted with him, was a dowdy creature who made you think of Rachel or Ristori. She wasn't anywhere, but if she did arrive it would be in such company.

They got "dates" occasionally at the big theatres in Manchester or elsewhere and, whether or not they kept the pot boiling, they did keep the lamp burning. One looked round the theatre sometimes at a few scattered enthusiasts, a few bored people who had been given tickets. The play on the stage represented, it might be, a great movement, an art that had roused

Europe, problems on which hung civilization. And here was an audience of ladies who looked like cooks at tripe shops and men who might have been impecunious barmen. Solemnly they were taking their pleasure with Ibsen. And I went back to the office to write a notice that ten people would read.

Errall amused Mr. Buckingham. He was, indeed, a prime joke, the kind of thing they ought to have in *Punch*.

"You see," said Buckingham, "when he's been at a first-class theatre and dropped money on it—cheap company, too, and no scenery—he writes to managers at second and third class towns. They think it must be a catch. If the show's good enough for a first-rate theatre in Manchester it'll do for us, and so they give him dates. Then he comes along to Oldham or Chowbent and gives 'em. 'A Doll's House' or 'The Master Builder.' Don't know the works myself. Titles all right; might be comedy or anything. Well, the people can't make head or tail of 'em. They want their money back. And then the manager comes to Errall and wants to know what the devil he means by it—what he's up to. Errall spouts away about fine art.

"And then," cried Buckingham, his voice taking a high incredulous note, "he comes here and wants me to finance him. Of course, he can't carry on. He'll be here this morning, and I might as well be out of the way. I don't say," he pursued, "that I wouldn't take the thing on if he gave me a free hand. I suppose there might be an audience somewhere for this kind

of thing if you could brighten it up a bit. I haven't seen the plays myself. I must read 'em."

I said I should like to see Errall.

"No good waiting," said Buckingham. "Irregular fellow. May not come." And then he told me that he sometimes paid a visit to his wine merchant about this time o' morning, and invited me to accompany him. His wine merchant! Grandiose fellow! We went off to a wine cellar where they gave you "dock glasses" of a generous vintage at a reasonable price. It isn't my habit to drink burgundy at eleven in the morning but I was sticking to my job. I paid for what Mr. Buckingham called the first round and a kind of vinous fellowship ensued. He said he was a man of the world himself, "but y'know this son-in-law of yours—mean t'say, y'know, actors damned respectable nowadays. Mightn't like it. Nay, wouldn't like it."

"Need they know?" I said.

He nodded. "Not bad burgundy?"

I said it was excellent.

"My turn now," he said. I protested. He yielded.

I had a vision of myself returning to Helen drunk and explaining that it was on Marmaduke's behalf. He would appreciate the situation.

It *wasn't* bad burgundy. I had a tolerant understanding of the man who becomes a drunkard. Putting sanity aside it is pleasant to hobnob with a friend (Buckingham as a friend! I was getting on) and call for another dock glass. They seem to do things handsomely at those docks, and a swig at the rich, dark stuff simplified things. Life wasn't so difficult, after

all. A little kindliness, a little tact and much could be done. Wine has had a great place in the world. And there's a tang about it that saves it from being just an ignoble indulgence. Of course we've our decencies, austerities, asperities. These in good time. Everything has its place. I shouldn't like to go about with a nose red from drink, and yet in the obscurity, the rich darkness of a suitable cellar what would it matter? I could see how easily, how comfortably it could be done. It only wants concentration. Drunkenness is an exclusive habit, and it hasn't a chance with you if you can realize how much it excludes. No, I hadn't any fear for myself; not any more than when sinking among cushions you might fear that you would never get up. But I thought of Marmaduke. I wondered whether I was making an excursion along the road that he might tread.

I gazed about me. Here you got wines from the wood and big barrels on stillages were the chief furniture of the place. It reminded me of stage pictures of German beer-cellars, and one might have expected a chorus of students to troop in. The company, beside ourselves, was two or three rather shabby, rather surreptitious men. Suddenly Buckingham said: "Damme, he's found us."

Errall was an eager, abstracted little man of middle age. He had a deprecating manner which frequently broke into something of protest or asperity. He said he had called at the office at the time appointed and he glared at Buckingham inquiringly. Buckingham said it was always possible to find a man of regular

habits, and then he introduced me with an air of "I suppose it has to be." I invited Errall to join us in our tipple; he wasn't loath and I could believe presently that the generous liquor had percolated into some dry cracks.

Buckingham intimated that I had a kind of interest in his show. "What name?" said Errall, and then "Daunt? What! of the *Herald*."

I admitted it and he inspected me curiously. And then he went off into a kind of harangue; he spoke of his struggle for art, his attachment to ideals, the masterpieces that had repelled others and fascinated him. He touched lightly but bitterly on want of recognition, more forcibly on the callousness, the frivolity of the public. He offered them great art. He couldn't do more.

I suppose all this was addressed to me. There didn't seem to be any point in saying it to the yawning Buckingham. But Errall turned sharply to him with: "Have you thought about my proposition?"

"You call it a proposition, do you?" said Buckingham. "Why d'you stick to this fellow Ibsen? Even Shaw would be better. Mind you, I've not read him. His day's over, though, unless you can brisk him up somehow."

"You might put in a few songs and dances," said Errall, and Buckingham accepted this withering sarcasm as a reasonable concession. "I must read 'em," he said, "but I should say that a good revue has more money in it than the whole boiling. Besides, I believe y'r highbrows are turning against him. I heard a

literary chap say the other day that poetry plays and crook plays are going to divide the stakes."

Mr. Buckingham remembered an engagement. To Errall's further and anxious inquiry he said: "Nothing doing." And then: "Mr. Daunt, here, has got something to say t'you."

He swaggered, lumbered out, and Errall turned to me with "You'd like to put in a little capital?" I said I was sorry but that wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to find an opening on the stage for my son-in-law, and Mr. Buckingham had suggested his company.

"Is he an actor?" said Errall.

I said that he had never appeared professionally.

"Oh, but you can't just pitchfork people on the stage like that," said he with some acerbity. "Who says he can act?"

I said that from little things I had seen him do it seemed to me that he was a born actor. Errall said: "I never thought you knew much about acting." Great Heaven! The second time that day! I said that I should like to see him in Errall's Company, which provoked: "My company? I don't know if it exists. We have to depend on such creatures as this Buckingham. My own money has gone. Did you say you had nothing to invest? But if I took your friend into the company? *Quid pro quo.* I used to think I was uncompromising. Now, I'm unscrupulous at a bargain."

I saw that bargain looming in front of me. I didn't want to commit myself, I didn't want to lose any kind

of chance. I asked Errall where they were acting and he said: "Nowhere this week. We should open at Preston on Monday. I can't do it without money."

He seemed a child, an idealist. What hope was there here for Marmaduke? What chance of stability in such an enterprise? I looked at my watch. But I didn't like severing this slenderest of threads. It was a kind of surprise to find myself saying: "Come out with me to lunch and have a look at my son-in-law."

Chapter 8

So Errall came out with me. He said something unintelligible about his poor wife; I didn't know whether the loss of his company for a few hours was the trouble or a general adversity of circumstance. Perhaps he would have liked her to accompany us, but I didn't feel that I could propose it. He was moody and we didn't talk business in tram or train. Helen took his advent calmly and hastened to make some additions to our usual fare. When she learnt that he was with us in some possible connection with Marmaduke's interests her benevolence deepened. Marmaduke was greatly interested, and he hit very well the mean between confidence and deference in dealing with Mr. Errall, who seemed a little scared, though we were all cordial to him. He struck one as having rather distinguished manners gone rusty. He regarded the children with something like astonishment, and it appeared that our circumstance was novel to him. I asked him if he had any family and he shook his head. At table he watched the children a good deal and he was gentle and pathetic with them. I saw him as an innocent making acquaintance with life after being shut up in a theatre.

We "did him" as well as we could at short notice, but the poor man appeared to be suspicious and afraid to give anything away; though, indeed, he hadn't much

to give. He preferred wine to whisky, speaking of it as a bottle of wine, for his speech was touched with reverberations from the stage. After lunch Helen took away her charges, Errall opening the door politely and gazing after them. He accepted a cigar and adopted the pose of the man of affairs. He said: "Well, what are you prepared to do?"

I wasn't prepared to finance his company, and so I said that all I wanted was a job for Marmaduke.

"A pig in a poke," said Marmaduke.

"Yes, I know nothing about him," said Errall. "Where's the inducement?"

"Ah!" said Marmaduke, "you haven't heard me recite Mark Antony's oration yet."

Errall turned to me: "Have you no interest in art? In our venture? You care nothing about what we devote our lives to?"

Marmaduke asked whether all the members of the company were devotees. Errall said that he was thinking of his poor wife. His poor wife! Why did he speak of her like that? I ventured to say that her acting had always interested me. "I should think so," he said. She was to him the greatest of actresses. He muttered something about tragedy, and one understood that it was the tragedy of a thwarted life. "We'll keep going while we can," he said. He admitted that the *Herald* had helped. It might have done more. I said that we tried to be just. "And justice," he said, "is commonly half-blind." With a fleeting complacency he looked at Marmaduke for approval.

Suddenly Errall said: "Does he want a salary?"

"Naturally," I replied.

"But do you expect me to give him parts to play when I know nothing about him? What does he know of the technique of acting? Come! What's your inducement? What'll you pay?"

Marmaduke looked at me blankly. "He doesn't know what he's missing, does he?"

Errall said: "I think you might make an actor. I've been watching you, of course. What are you? What have you done?"

Marmaduke looked at me deprecatingly. He said: "Mr. Errall ought to know that I've done five years."

"Five years?" Errall repeated. "Then you're not a novice?"

"It isn't really five," said Marmaduke. "They let you out sooner if you're good."

Errall stared at him and at me. "So that's it?" he said. "What for?"

"Forgery," said Marmaduke.

Errall looked at me for corroboration and I suppose he saw it in my face. He began to laugh as one would at a bitter end to a promising adventure. There was some passing cry of the children upstairs and he stopped suddenly.

"Do they know?" he said.

"The elder ones—yes," said Marmaduke.

He sank into gloomy thought. "I wonder if I could have the pluck to do a thing like that," he said. Then he added: "One gets out of sympathy with society, with the constitution of things. And yet——"

I interposed. I put a vague case for Marmaduke. I used that blessed word rehabilitation. On the practical side I mentioned that I would guarantee him for any amount. I pleaded for liberalism. What are the judgments of society? We mustn't confound a man's spirit with a man's actions. I was speaking, I felt, to a confirmed idealist, I was pushing at an open door. Indeed, he dismissed society with a gesture but he was disconcerted to find himself outpaced. He began to talk about practical difficulties.

Marmaduke said: "Do you think it a positive bar?"

He said: "Does that fool Buckingham know?"

I said that he did, but had promised to keep it secret.

"That's nothing," said Errall. "He's a blabber." Then to Marmaduke he said: "Don't think I'm pronouncing judgment on you. I know nothing about it —motives—circumstances. Why! man," he cried, "the world that my art lives in is full of sin and crime. I play such parts as Borkman and Lovborg, and play them with all the sympathy in my nature. I'm a fanatic, of course. And, for anything I know, you're the finest spirit of the time. Perhaps not. And there are certain practical difficulties."

"They can be got over," I said.

"But what can he do?" cried Errall. "And how much will you give us?" Then he turned to Marmaduke with "Give us a taste of your quality. Come! A passionate speech!"

And Marmaduke, undaunted, began his "Most potent, grave and reverend signiors"; he was well stocked with dramatic poetry. Errall listened with an

air of disparagement, though Marmaduke, if uninspired, did it well. At the end he turned to me with "What of that?"

"He won't disgrace you," I said.

"But there's nothing to show that he can act."

A small voice piped up outside the door: "Do a funny one."

Randy had been listening, and now he was hauled in. He was induced to recite "Tiger, tiger, burning bright," and Errall listened with rapt attention. He was softened; we might have been playing upon his feelings with the child. His absorption in watching Randy was strange to see. It gave me a sense of the man's austere, withdrawn life. He patted Randy's shoulder timidly, saying, "Well done! Well done!" Then he fumbled in his pocket and, not understanding, I watched him as he hesitated between sixpence and a shilling. He chose the sixpence and gave it to Randy with "There! There!" and gently pushed him away. Randy looked doubtfully at his father, who said: "Thank Mr. Errall for his great kindness." So Randy said: "Thank you for your great kindness," and, grabbing the sixpence tightly, he hurried off.

We gazed at one another. We had lost the thread. It was difficult to return to hard, mundane matters. With bitter facetiousness Errall said: "I'm afraid I haven't room for a child in my company." He might have been angry with himself. Coming back to realities, they didn't seem very real; the child seemed to have disturbed our values. I was conscious of a jerk in returning to the point. I said: "Well, at least he

can declaim verse like an educated man. And you'll see that he can do more than that."

Errall said: "Your standards of acting never had much reference to practical things."

"You're fellow-idealists," suggested Marmaduke.

"I've read your essays on the play with interest," Errall pursued. "Perhaps you weren't far wrong about my wife and me. I suppose I'm a failure; I haven't got it in me. I persist, that's all. She's a tragic failure. Ah! If she had fair chances!"

"You mustn't undervalue her accomplishment," I said, "that's positive. She has done remarkable things."

"Do you know what the life is?" he said to Marmaduke. "Do you realize the handicap under which we work? We are perpetually flogging a dead horse. You'll say she has her chances. She plays big parts in some kind of theatre and there's some kind of a company and a few people in the pit. We're only human. We're fools and dogged idealists, but what you'd call a spiritual success isn't enough. If you shouted at us, applauded, made us feel alive; gave us bouquets, champagne, adulation, honours! Don't treat us like dogs. We can't afford dresses, we can't afford anything. How can you be great in an empty theatre? You're failing all the time. We are tainted with that curse of acting: we want to cut a figure. But she shall play Cleopatra. You think I couldn't play Antony? Yes, I know I haven't got the flair, the facility—what you people call passion—but I'm intelligent, I can see it

all. Yes, and I can feel it. But to have to take the stage when you feel that nobody wants you——!"

I suppose the man was enjoying his frankness. I played up to him with the suggestion that you might find analogies in the other arts; in painting, literature. "Why!" I said, "we all have to contend with feelings such as yours. I might be starting a book now if I could believe that half-a-dozen people really cared whether I ever wrote again or not. Artists have to force their wares on reluctant buyers just like any manufacturer."

"Oh, come, sir!" said Marmaduke.

"Perhaps you think there's a demand for your Antony?" said Errall with gloomy sarcasm.

"Are you prepared to take me on any terms?" said Marmaduke.

Errall was snappish. "My dear sir," he said, "don't you see the absurdity of it? Take you to what? You wouldn't get your first week's salary—if you had a salary."

The subject dropped, though we hadn't done with it. We didn't know what to do with Errall next. We took him into the garden and he stared at flowers, trees, the landscape, as if he had never seen such things before. I think he must have regarded them as uncommonly realistic scenery; he was concentrated on the theatre. He seemed to know an enormous amount of dramatic verse and frequently quoted from it; he might have been prepared to understudy everybody in everything. We prevailed upon him to play croquet

at which he was fantastically inefficient. Trying to make a long shot he failed to hit his own ball. The game petered out and we sat about on deck chairs. He said: "I suppose curates still play this game?" It was his effort at small talk.

We had tea, and his melancholy suggested that he was thinking of his wife, but he didn't seem anxious about trains and I thought he hadn't done with me yet. Marmaduke was restless, like a dog that knows there's food about. Presently Randal came home and I got him aside and explained the position. We watched Marmaduke talking to Errall on the lawn, and Randal said: "Look, how eager he is. This has put new life into him. Do something if it's possible." I said that the thing was sure to fail, that the company must come to grief again. And, of course, I couldn't spare much. I wasn't going to impoverish the family over a wild-cat scheme. If a hundred or two—I went out to Errall and Marmaduke, and Randal came with me.

Errall seemed timid and unwilling to talk business. We went over some old ground and I tried to get him to outline his plans for the near future. He didn't despair of bringing in "that ridiculous Buckingham," but I asked him how he could expect Buckingham to support what was from his point of view a mere persistence in failure. Errall muttered something about compromise and eyed Marmaduke as though measuring him as a part in it. Then Helen's head emerged from an upper window with "Dinner in ten minutes," and Errall started up with exclamations about trains

and his wife. But he didn't want to go yet and was easily induced to stay.

Over a glass of port we made a very vague arrangement. I was to "do something" and Marmaduke was to get up the part of Oswald in "Ghosts" for a beginning. "Ghosts" was now freed from the censorship and it had a valuable reputation for being scandalous, which might give it a chance. Possibly this would appeal to the preposterous Buckingham, who might be induced to consider "riskiness" as a reasonable compromise in that matter of brisking up. Poor Errall, a man of niceties and compunctions, was wondering how far he could go. He wanted the masterpiece, not the scandal, but if a play could be both, why then—— His wife, of course, would play the mother. It was out of her line, but an actress of genius hasn't a line; she can play Puck and Lady Macbeth. Sadly he said: "I shall have to do Parson Manders."

Randal asked him why he didn't do some Shakespeare, and he said there were too many people in his plays. "Do you know the size of my company?" he said; "and, besides, I'm a modern."

"Is Ibsen still modern?" said Randal, and Errall glared at him. Then, to my embarrassment, Marmaduke asked him if he knew my plays. He shook his head and said that he must be getting home.

Helen had made dinner earlier than usual with a view to his departure, and now little Mary came in to say good night. Coming to Errall she put up her face to be kissed. He was baffled and touched her head with "There, there." She waited and he looked at

her earnestly. Then he took her by the shoulders and kissed her forehead solemnly. He made quite a ceremony of it. "He has no children," he said, and then asked me whether Macduff was referring to Macbeth. I said it was impossible to say, but that I thought it was about two to one the other way. He said I was quite wrong.

Randy came and he and Errall shook hands as man to man. Yet Errall was wistful. "Children, children," he said. It was a new idea. Then he said he would like to do "King John" and that his wife would be magnificent as Constance. "But there's Arthur," he said, and asked Randy's age. He had begun to think of him in terms of his blessed plays.

Marmaduke returned to the subject of my plays and proposed that we should read one, taking parts. Errall started as though at a serpent in his path. "Is that what you're up to?" he said. "I deal only in masterpieces." He was magnificently haughty. But he was scared too and demanded a time-table. Helen, appealed to on this practical point and anxious to lose no chance for Marmaduke, offered him a bed. But it was too late to wire to his poor wife. The telephone was suggested and it appeared that if you telephoned to the chemist in the street near the lodgings, he might prevail on his boy to take a message. Errall wanted to stay; he didn't want to relinquish me till he had got a little further. But when he heard that we hadn't a telephone, but must go to a call-office, he was discouraged and thought he might as well go at once. Randal intervened, offering to see the message through, and he

was instructed to promise sixpence for the boy and to order the aspirin, as before, to be sent to Mrs. Errall. That was settled, but for some time Errall was sunk in gloom. I inquired about the other members of his company and he said: "Starving in garrets—like my poor wife." He glared at our dishevelled table as though such comparative luxury was abhorrent to him.

When Randal came back and announced that the message had been received and would certainly be passed on to Mrs. Errall, he cheered up amazingly and shouted, "Let's have one other gaudy night," and he followed this up with "What about that play of yours?" I demurred, and when Randal insisted that what he required was modern novelties of fine quality he hissed out: "Who's good enough to pit against Ibsen?" You couldn't help respecting such scorn. I had to check Marmaduke's eulogy of my works; I think he saw himself bringing glory on the family by acting in them. I suggested that we should read "Macbeth," but Errall eyed Helen doubtfully, thinking, I suppose, that she could hardly take his wife's place as Lady Macbeth. Errall wanted to read "Little Eyolf" or "The Pretenders" and mentioned his ambition to play "Emperor and Galilean," beginning in the morning and allowing intervals for refreshment.

We had a great evening: we started on the third act of "Othello," the chief parts being assigned to Marmaduke and to Errall, who said he wished to try some new business as Iago. It wasn't a mere reading. Marmaduke knew most of Othello's speeches and gave tongue to them royally. At the great climax he had Errall by

the throat and bade fair to throttle him. In his excitement he forgot the words—he had dropped the book—and he bellowed inarticulately. You had to see and hear it to believe it of Marmaduke, and yet I recalled the times when to the terror and joy of the children he had "got in a passion." Randal stared at him in wonder. "Why!" he said, "this is a primeval savage." Helen looked on in amazement and Marmaduke, recovering his sanity, glared at her apprehensively.

And Errall, spluttering and choking, was furiously astonished. "Is he a lunatic?" he asked me, and I began to laugh. Errall really seemed to fear that we were foisting a madman on him.

"Splendid raw material!" said Randal.

"I agree with you about the rawness," Errall said and then—oh, magnanimously!—he said that Marmaduke had something in him. "Though," he added, "he would soon use up a company." He laughed; we all laughed. And then we became aware of little Randy, in his pyjamas, peeping through the door ajar. "Do it again," he said. He had heard it and now wanted to see it.

"Again?" grumbled Errall. He was fingering his throat.

"You've got to keep your head," he said to Marmaduke, but he eyed him with respect. Helen led Randy away, telling him in answer to his curious inquiries that they had been having a rough game. "Do they have rough games as late as this?" he said. He regretted

this absurd custom of sending him to bed before the fun was over. Would they be induced to do it again to-morrow?

Marmaduke admitted that he forgot the words and said he didn't want to let down the spirit of the scene. Words, he would agree, are a moderating influence. He affirmed, on no particular evidence, that Salvini's greatest effect was when he roared like a bull. To an actor words are no great matter.

Errall declined to agree, but pronounced for Iago as the part that an intellectual actor would choose. He was dissatisfied because Marmaduke's overpowering vigour had prevented that new business he had proposed to show us. Randal suggested doing the scene again and Errall's hand went instinctively to his throat. Marmaduke promised moderation and offered to give the speeches without handling Iago, but Errall heroically declared that a reasonable amount of throttle was necessary to the effect. So Marmaduke was set off again at the great speech, "Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content." He did it finely, and then his determination to spare Errall took the edge off a little. He hurled Iago upon the sofa with strict moderation and, according to instructions, he relapsed into a chair by the table and buried his face in his hands. And then came Errall's business. With a snarl he plucked out an imaginary dagger and darted upon Othello in a crawl. But, as Errall put it to us afterwards, intellect became dominant again. He sheathed the dagger, rose to his feet and composed himself to his speech

"Are you a man?" It was ingenious enough, but I nearly exploded when he turned round to us with "See?" We assured him that we did see.

Later we did read an act of one of my plays. At the "curtain" Errall said: "Stop! Wait a bit." Randal wanted to continue, but Errall said he wanted to think about it. "I see the idea," he said. "All that change and emotion and then the normal life begins again. The people return to the conventions, but it can never be the same." He was intelligent about it. He said he would like the rest another time, but that now he would go to bed. "I've had change and agitation enough," he said. "I wish I could get back to my wife, but I suppose that's impossible now. It has been stimulating—too stimulating."

But he didn't get off. He had some whisky and a cigar. "Extraordinary!" he muttered. "What a day!" He lived a quiet life. He went about forcing upon people what they didn't want, but he had learnt to do it without excessive agitation.

We talked of the drama and he gave us lofty, idealistic stuff about it. Marmaduke went to sleep and Helen had long since gone to bed. Randal held on politely, but we were all becoming petrified. Errall abandoned his cigar; he said it was too strong for him. The evening petered out.

Chapter 9

I FOUND myself strangely involved in theatrical enterprise. I knew little about it and I couldn't think that Errall knew much. My enthusiasms are apt to be clogged with scepticism and, anyhow, I couldn't see the Erralls as what is called a commercial proposition. No; from that point of view they were absurd, but you may be sublime and absurd. I've an incurable common sense, but I hoard the memory of a few rashnesses. I began by lending Errall £200, and I suppose the whole venture cost me close on £1,000. The company was on a very small scale, necessarily. I couldn't afford it but, of course, it was on Marmaduke's account, on Helen's account. And yet not altogether. I had a great reluctance to see this shaky edifice of the Erralls collapse. At times I thought more about them than about Marmaduke. One thing pushes another out; it is a dull man who keeps his life in right proportions. I sympathized with that magnificent idealism. It hurt me when Marmaduke declared that Ibsen was now a fossil, an historical survival of extraordinary interest. It seemed disloyal to the Erralls, who still believed that they were at the heart of things. If they were not they were ridiculous.

Marmaduke didn't lead them to triumph, but he was not incompetent and was capable of giving surprises. One of his attractions was that you couldn't see to the

end of him. The trouble was that he became so terribly bored by the life. He had no companions; the people in the company were either vulgar or queer. Mr. and Mrs. Errall, he said, were abstractions. I said that Errall was a very real person to me, and he maintained that the evening at Darley was exceptional and that, of course, everybody must have a fundamental humanity. Mrs. Errall lived on the higher plane, but she darned the company's socks. They were enthusiasts, certainly, and enthusiasm, Marmaduke declared, was the only thing that mattered. He cried out for zest, gusto, but how could you exercise these in lodgings at Bolton? Randal asked whether you could have zest in tranquillity and Marmaduke said: "Certainly. Look at the humming-top." He was always ready for fun, and a little nonsense raised his spirits.

"Of course," he said, "to the critical, artistic eye the Erralls are magnificent; they are wonderful specimens. You may throw them phrases and they seize them as a dog a bone. 'An insertion of the spiritual life upon a material world.' Things like that. And so they are ready to try 'Love's Comedy' on Oldham."

Helen performed prodigies in making excursions to towns at which Marmaduke was acting and then rushing back to her children. Occasionally Marmaduke got home, and once he was met with an inquiry from little Mary: "Have you been to prison?" His philosophy deserted him. He had dealt equably or charmingly with many situations as difficult, but now he was

angry, bitterly vexed; he spoke harshly to the child. Later he made it up with her. Children, when their anger or resentment is gone, will abase themselves like dogs. Oh, she had been naughty, naughty. And oh, he declared, she had a cruel, wicked old daddy. They sentimentalized together and Helen, joining them, sympathized and yet helped to restore sanity.

I felt this life of ours as very sad; I was dispirited about it. And then, abstracting myself from its moods, from its failings and shortcomings, I could believe that it was sad only because, like all beautiful things, it passed. It seemed that the inertia of age was descending upon me. Randal was full of life and vigour, Helen fulfilled her function and rose to the occasion, the children were quaint, charming, wayward, as children should be. Marmaduke? Well, he was a disturbing, doubtful fellow, but he made us live. Had I got to the point that I must have people ranged? And I had always wanted to keep up, to maintain sympathies with revolt, to see life with fresh eyes.

Really, the attempt to keep Marmaduke up to the scratch had its comic aspect. We were all so intent upon it, we were past the stage of wondering why such a disproportionate amount of help and direction should be given to him. Sometimes Helen was away for two or three nights with him, Randal braved these ghastly manufacturing towns on occasion, I did what I could; even the good Antony Derwent sometimes looked him up. The thought that we were concentrating on him got on his nerves sometimes. He was magnanimous in enduring our help.

The repertory of Errall's company was not large and it wasn't necessary to do much rehearsing. Errall had intentions to do plays by Claudel, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Strindberg, Tchehov, but these were indefinitely postponed for opportunity. So Marmaduke had time on his hands, and the amenities of Lancashire and Yorkshire towns are soon exhausted. The actor who doesn't play games is driven to museums, parks, picture-galleries, and public-houses. Poor Marmaduke was bored; he was at the end of his resources, Helen must do all she could, and presently I learnt that she had made what was, perhaps, for her a natural and inevitable concession. She had children enough, but now it was possible that she might have more. But Marmaduke one day said to me gloomily: "Why can't Helen and I be fanatical together about something? Look at those Erralls!"

I said: "You have children."

"I sometimes forget the children," he said. "I'm an egoist. I wonder if there's more than I think in custom, tradition, duty. I'm not so bad, really, but I want a fresh inspiration every time. And then I sink back on lethargy and original animalism. I dare say you want a bit of duty to float you over part of your life. I wish I could do something for the children."

"You can do lots for them," I said, but he stared at me vacantly.

The company came to Stockport, which might appear to be an unlikely town. Ah! but Stockport has its vein of idealism. Perhaps it will die away, perhaps we shall all return to primeval mud. Stockport has its

Garrick Society, an association of people determined to see, read, act good plays. Marmaduke might object that they were always trying to do the right thing; they were not following their own blessed egos to death or destruction, or life and joy, or wherever they may lead. It is an old controversy and the formulas shift a little. These meritorious efforts are not supported by the fashionable hedonists, but an enthusiasm which takes you over some barren tracks is better than none. Marmaduke was capable of sympathy with such forlorn hopes as this venture of the Erralls. Their performances were the antithesis of what you used to get at the St. James's Theatre under Alexander or the Haymarket with Cyril Maude (I am a little antiquated in my examples but they will serve). Trousers were not very well pressed, dresses did not come from Paris, provincial accents sometimes offended the fastidious ear and, even worse, when they couldn't get "dates" in a theatre they used a hall. But Stockport had its theatre, and Errall brought his company to this. As Darley was within easy range it made a kind of holiday for Marmaduke, and we all felt that things were looking up.

We grasped our nettle and invited a few friends to go to see Marmaduke act. His best part was Oswald and so, in spite of my misgivings, "Ghosts" was selected. We brought Marmaduke away with us after the performance. The evening would have been a great success if it hadn't been for the play. Why should superior things be horrid? Mrs. Errall made no success at all; I suppose she was too sharply tragic

and missed that blessed touch of nature which should have made us kin. I was vexed with myself for seeing her through others' eyes. I wanted to know what Randal thought of it. He said he was afraid it was all up. Helen, poor girl, flushed and trembled when Marmaduke seemed athwart our conventions. We were all hampered by the social sense. This wasn't doing Marmaduke any good. I suggested to Randal that there was something fine about Mrs. Errall—a thwarted, starved genius for acting. He grunted doubtfully. Was it my own illusion? I couldn't be certain of anything.

Our friends were very polite. Several times they applauded faintly. An enthusiastic minority in the cheap seats did applaud. Probably the Labour Party. You clever people! What plays you like! Above our heads, of course. But what a pleasant evening! This came after sandwiches and claret-cup at home. Marmaduke was in high spirits. He ridiculed the show; he took the Philistines' point of view. Errall's pretensions! Mrs. Errall's deadliness! He said they were all like undertakers' men and pew openers. Randal, who hated anything like disloyalty, spoke to him in a sharp undertone and he pulled up. "Oh, yes," he said, "the thing's absurd and I'm the most ridiculous person in it. I'm the worst actor. I haven't a tithe of these people's talent nor a shred of their enthusiasm. Beside the Erralls we're all sunk in sloth and materialism. They are the play; comedy and tragedy in one." He went from one extreme to the other. Our guests didn't understand him. A queer fellow. Madness in

the family. Why didn't we plead that at his trial? Poor Helen Daunt! She hadn't done well for herself. And here still was Antony Derwent, who used to admire her, faithfully handing sandwiches to her. Was he going to remain a bachelor all his life for her sake? Sentimental. Ridiculous.

Marmaduke Abney was clever, of course, but what's the good of that without principle? Well, we agree to let bygones be bygones. We are magnanimous in these days; we shake hands with criminals. The Daunts have been very unfortunate and perhaps it's not their fault. There is something rather taking about Mr. Abney at times. There is satisfaction in knowing that you've been tactful and kind.

Chapter 10

I MET Mr. Buckingham in a Manchester street and he stopped me when I tried to pass with a nod. He was moved, he was swayed, by disinterested emotion. "I've seen that show," he said, "I've seen it. Why! You never—of all the—upon my word"—He couldn't get it out. It was an indignant crescendo. He hadn't words. He shook his fist at the sky. Then: "They asked me to see it," he said. "They invited me. They sent me tickets, and I went. I was to put money into that, was I? Why, sir! It wasn't even decent—not respectable, you know. Of course there was no fun. No man alive could make anything of it. As for your nephew—son-in-law, is it?—he wasn't any worse than the others. The women's dresses—they must have come in for the fag end of the summer sales—Oldham Street, you know. Errall? He's a maniac. Any one can see that he's not all there, but I never expected such lunacy as that. It was like a funeral with people howling now and then."

I tried to get away, but he caught hold of me. "You don't mean to say you're putting money into that," he cried. "You mustn't. Great Scott! Are you off your nut? See! Here's a grid. Stuff a few pound notes down it. Light your pipe with 'em. Just to let off steam. It's as good as what you're doing."

He clutched me as one would a friend who insisted on cutting his throat. Yes, he was quite disinterested. He couldn't bear to see a fellow-creature acting like that. Doubtless there was the pride of the expert behind it all.

I received a telegram from Errall. The company had penetrated to the Midlands and was doing a week at Loughton. They were at a hall and the business was wretched. Errall wasn't explicit, but I gathered that, among other things, Marmaduke was in some kind of trouble. As Helen didn't know about the telegram I told her, before I went, that I wanted to have a talk again with Marmaduke and Errall. She nodded sadly. It was understood between us that the experiment was failing, that it might be very near its end. She said: "You've done enough. We'd better have him home. And then——"

She gazed blankly at me, through me. She was thinking of her four children. She was a heavily encumbered woman, and I had dreamed of a free and glorious life for her. But of course, life can't be free, though we must cherish the idea, we must have our turns at freedom. She had none; she had become a drudge. So, in my bitterness, I thought, but she wasn't merely that. She could still be superb and elegant; if ever, for a time, she lost her serenity, she regained it. My pride in her, my affection, were undimmed, but I suppose they had become less romantic. I foresaw the time when she would be a mother to me. She said again: "You've done enough," but then she said: "I can't see my way."

"Don't look too far ahead. Take it day by day."

"Would you say that to Marmaduke?" she asked.

I said: "Certainly not. You're different persons."

"We're a perpetual burden on you."

"My dear woman," I said, "what could I do without you? How can I ever do enough for you? Don't deprive me of my grandchildren; I couldn't get on without Marmaduke now. And, of course, there's old Randal. I think it's quite an amusing family to be in."

"You talk like Marmaduke sometimes," she said.

With mock dignity I said: "Doesn't he talk like me?"

It was like the old childish days when I tried to coax her into a happy temper. The happy temper came now if some favourable light could be thrown on Marmaduke.

"He has tried, hasn't he?" she said.

"Like a brick," said I.

She smiled, but "There are times when it's all hopeless," she said.

I replied with obvious encouragements. I think I overdid it. I made out that our circumstances were really very jolly, that we were getting on nicely.

"Yes, we're killing time," she said.

Killing time! That thought has often afflicted me. There's no movement, no change or trivial ones; you're getting older but there's no casualty yet; and then may come a mood in which you say: they can't expect much from me now. You are tired, you don't want to bother, you read trivial things and defer

big things to the energetic mood. It's natural enough, I suppose. But for young people to be killing time!

"Don't look sad," said Helen.

"I'm all right," I cried. "It's you. I want you to be happier. You don't have much fun."

"You can't be unhappy," she said, "when you're very, very grateful."

But I couldn't be satisfied with that kind of happiness for her. We were dissatisfied, loving one another, missing one another.

"I wish I could be more to you," she said.

"That's impossible."

"Oh, but cleverer, I mean. As you say, more amusing."

"We might have nice little literary discussions," I said. "But we go deeper than that."

"I sit there stupidly, darning the children's socks."

I shook my head smilingly and she smiled in response. We gazed at one another, examined one another wistfully. Something had gone, we were subject to change and decay. You can't perpetuate your zests, you can't nail your colours to the mast. The glory of her youth had gone, my passion had yielded to tender affection.

She said suddenly: "You wouldn't trust me with all you are thinking about Marmaduke?"

"But it's impossible, my dear," I said. "I'm always thinking and half-thinking about him. It's too complicated; we should never end; it's my principal occupation."

"With what you know about him, then?"

"This is all I know," and I took Errall's telegram out of my pocket and gave it to her. "I thought it was time he did something amusing."

She stared at it frowningly: "What does it mean?"

"Nothing very serious, I think. I fancy Errall wanted to ensure my coming. You mustn't bother about these little episodes. We shall never make Marmaduke into a staid citizen."

"I thought something was wrong," she said, "and it falls on you again."

"Don't make a tragedy of it," I said. "I showed it to you because I don't want to hide things and I know you're no fool. Get away to those children. I must be off."

She said: "I'm going to be sensible and calm. That'll help you, won't it?"

"Of course it will," I cried. I felt almost exultant.

It was late in the evening when I got to Loughton and, after leaving my bag at an hotel, I set out for the hall which was the best accommodation Errall could get. It was hardly dark, but I had some difficulty in finding it in a comparatively obscure street, and when it was positively identified I was disconcerted to see that it was closed, blank, deserted. Here, then, was disaster. I was trying a door handle when a policeman came round the corner. "Here! what's this?" he said, and, rather unnecessarily, turned his lantern upon me. I asked why the place wasn't open and was telling him that a company should have been playing there—I pointed to certain bills—when he interrupted. "They've chucked it," he said.

"Why?"

"No business, I suppose. Nobody wanted this stuff. Crazy lot."

"And where are they all?"

How was he to know. "One of 'em's in quod."

My heart sank. "Which? Who?"

"Nay, I can't tell y'. Did hear the name. Sh'd know it if you mentioned it."

I suggested Jenkinson, Tompkins, Fotheringay. He shook his head. "Abney?"

"That's more like it," he said.

"In prison? What for?"

"Drunk and disorderly."

"But they only fine for that."

"Ah! But he cheeked the court."

"Damnation," I said.

"Friend o' yours?" he said condescendingly. He looked at me appraisingly and I suppose it was my respectable appearance which prompted: "Owes y' money?"

"That's it," I said.

"No go, then," he said, and it occurred to me that a policeman has something in common with a bank. I asked about sentence and circumstance. He said he wasn't in court, but his mate on a near beat told him. "Five shillings and costs as usual. No need for any fuss. But he ups and says it's absurd. Insult he said it was. Man who'd done five years to be fined five shillings. What about his status in the world of crime, he says. Sublime to ridiculous. Y'never heard anything like it. He wouldn't 'ush. Might 'a been

drinking all night, so fresh 'e was. So 'is worship give him seven days. I must be gettin' on. This isn't strictly regular."

He didn't know where the rest of the company were. He thought the caretaker of the hall lived Eden Street way. Didn't know his name. The post office wouldn't be open. However, he directed me to a police station —the one at which Marmaduke had been charged.

There they mixed sympathy with condescension. It was no use talking about bail; he had got to do his seven days. "A lively gentleman. Said he'd done five years. Any truth in that?"

The sergeant was disposed to be chatty. He reminded me of the friends who are grateful to you for breaking in upon their dull evening. Yes, he had been in court. He didn't see what Marmaduke's game was. I suggested that it was just a bit of high spirits. "Yes," he said, "but it's a rum thing it should last till morning. There's lots of high spirits the night before." As an experienced observer he had been struck by the difference a few hours make. "The cells takes it out of 'em. And then in liquor there's what you call a reaction. Scientific fact. They may have been as merry as lords, but in the morning it's like as if they had come out of a deaf and dumb asylum. Not always. Your friend seemed full o' beans. Dunno why."

And I didn't know why. Marmaduke was like that. There was always the chance of releasing a spring in him. He was dull and moody, and then he suddenly became hilarious. He was conscious of the trick, and

said he wasn't sure whether it was throwing off the mask or putting it on; sometimes one and sometimes the other, perhaps.

I inquired about Errall, and the sergeant put me on his track. He eyed me curiously. "Not much in the pound there, I'm afraid, sir," he said. I suppose he wondered whether I was a friend or a creditor and wished to suggest the less offensive alternative.

Chapter II

I FOUND Mr. and Mrs. Errall at poor lodgings and they received me with gravity, with dignity, with a sufficient sense of importance of the occasion. "You have heard?" Errall said, and I nodded. I thought he was referring to Marmaduke in particular, but that, it appeared, was a secondary consideration. "There was practically no audience whatever," he said. "We had given away a few tickets. I thought it due to the handful of people there to come before the curtain and make an explanation. I was sorry it couldn't be reported." Mrs. Errall intervened: "The world should hear it," she said.

Errall continued: "I have written out the gist of it and sent it to the local paper. I suppose it will appear to-morrow. Perhaps not. It is a statement that should echo down the ages. The company is disbanded. And, by the by, Abney is locked up. Gone to prison. An absurd and unwarrantable affair. Such a ludicrous incident is, in the circumstances, most inopportune."

"He has not the sense of tragedy," said Mrs. Errall. I felt annoyed. "Tragedy has a considerable range," I said, and I thought: If these people can't see Marmaduke as tragic, how can they hope to succeed in their work? Of course, I wasn't fair to them. Marmaduke could be an irritant.

They were full of themselves, of this long-deferred calamity, of the blindness and ingratitude of the world. They were fanatics; they had cultivated their little plot in a kind of cold frenzy; they were magnificently superior and possessed by a lofty incredulity. The end of the world had come and nobody took any notice. Posterity was invoked, but one didn't see how posterity was to be got at; even if the editor of the paper printed Errall's protest and the paper was filed at the public library it wasn't likely that posterity would refer to it much. The Erralls sat there gazing into the future, and one wondered what it would be for them. You may see likeness in unlikeness, and they suggested to me Mr. and Mrs. Micawber with the buoyancy gone.

Mrs. Errall was darning her husband's socks, and she did it clumsily. It went to my heart, but I hardened a little at the idea that it was self-conscious: see what I am doing, she might have said, when thousands should be hanging on my words.

But I felt that I must be "nice" to them. I said some handsome, resounding things. They were true, or very nearly true. I silenced all my doubts. I found myself making the kind of speech that accompanies a piece of plate when a citizen has given a park to his native town or gone on being meritorious for fifty years. I looked at them as I spoke. I looked from one to the other, and their eyes were shining. Great God! The woman was trembling. Yes, she should have been swaying those thousands. A thwarted spirit. They had done their part. I was rhetorical. I rolled

out the phrases, and it seemed to give me, and them, satisfaction. Memorable in human effort—a garden blooming in the desert—great art interpreted by great artists—that kind of thing. I wasn't insincere. At any rate, I felt it.

I am a good sort of fellow. I gave them a splendid talking, and I don't think they'll forget it, but I cooled to the conviction that I am a good sort; I'm not very proud of it, of course. I had put something like a thousand pounds into their preposterous venture. That had gone and it didn't seem to weigh on them, though Errall did refer to it. He said some handsome things about me and Mrs. Errall murmured assents. They considered that in spirit I was one of them. I think that in the future they will point to me as a justification. I reminded them of the great art patrons of the Renaissance. I was the kind of thing that was wanted, but there should be dozens of me and richer ones. I was the type of the critical connoisseur, the pure embodiment of enthusiasm for art. And then Errall faltered. I think he had remembered Marmaduke. And, indeed, Marmaduke was a qualification of all this; I felt that Marmaduke, somehow, was not quite in good taste. No; he was not the point. Presently, perhaps. Now, these people deserved anything I could give them.

There was a thump or bang on the door, and a maid, who recalled the lodging-house maid of farce, entered bearing a tray. It was their supper of bread and cheese and they stared at it, as though in amazement. Then Errall called my attention to it with a

grandiose gesture. I had vague thoughts of proposing a heartening supper somewhere with champagne and oysters, but it was late, and I didn't know how to set about it; besides it was impossible, and it would have spoilt their tragic pose.

Mrs. Errall invited me to join them and asked the maid for another plate. She murmured something to her husband and he said: "Yes, let us have beer—bottles of beer." The maid looked doubtful but conceded the possibility of it. I realized that I was hungry; it was long since I had eaten. The bread and cheese seemed uncommonly good and I was glad to see that the loaf was substantial. I ate heartily and enjoyed the sharp bitter beer. Errall persisted in ironic gestures and interjections, but presently we got on to a more human plane.

And what about Marmaduke? I ventured, at last, to introduce him. Was he any good? Might he have a chance in another company? Would he make an actor? They looked at one another, and Mrs. Errall said he was good for an amateur. Errall began to talk about technique. They didn't appear to have any particular opinion. I suppose they hadn't noticed him much; he was outside their more pressing preoccupations. He had done passably the parts they had given him but we were no nearer to anything. They had it on their minds that, after all, the £1,000 wasn't simply an offering at the shrine of art and that, in some form, I might complain of not getting value for my money. And Marmaduke was hardly with us in the impassioned relation we had achieved. I

suppose we had been enjoying ourselves on an ideal plane and he represented the return to anxieties, embarrassments, everyday matters.

I realized that these people could do no more for us. The venture hadn't been a success, but I wouldn't have agreed that it was folly to have tried it. And yet the wicked thing about failure is that it breeds doubts, and doubts disorganize your mind. If Marmaduke, his work in the company being precisely what it had been, had achieved success, I suppose I should have joined whole-heartedly in the chorus of applause. In what spirit should I discuss the Erralls with a man of the world? Perhaps I should not come so near to the truth as when I startled them with my praise.

I should soon have to face Helen again. I had so often forced comfort upon her by insisting on Marmaduke's charm, his wit, his vivacity. But what are all these if he failed and failed? Of course I had my formulas and tried to give them variety; he lived in his qualities, not in his deeds. But you can't get away from the world altogether. You revolt against it, you hate its obvious, superficial measures, but you can't live alone; you can't in the ridiculous old phrase, keep yourself unspotted from the world. I think that our small section of the world would have thought it more "in keeping" if Marmaduke, being such a failure, had been dull and melancholy. He persisted in being an entertaining fellow.

I wondered what the Erralls were going to do, where would be their next stopping place, what means of support they had. I inquired about other members

of the company and it appeared that they were all gone or going. Errall told me that he had used the remainder of my last remittance to speed them on their way, and I assured him that he had done right. They were reticent about their own movements and I felt that I must offer a loan. I went about it delicately and it was declined. They were ready to take my money for the cause of art, not for themselves. "Some day, perhaps——" Errall began and trailed off into vagueness. I had a brutal impulse to say, "No, you don't"—but I refrained. I knew they were poor and suspected that they were almost penniless. I had a cheque-book in my pocket and produced it. He watched me writing and when I handed over a cheque for £50 with friendly apology and insistence he had the curiosity to glance at it. He made as if he would tear it, but paused and then asked his wife for the loan of her scissors. With these he cut the cheque ceremoniously into four pieces and handed them to me. I was bewildered, but I didn't like to ask what he was up to. I think it was some preposterous refinement of courtesy. He wanted emphasis, but to tear the cheque would be rude.

Then Errall took some money out of his pocket and counted it. "I wish you would lend me a pound," he said. "That will take us to London."

"And then?" I said.

He looked at his wife. She hesitated and then said: "We go to friends."

They both looked gloomy, but they were acting their parts with conviction. Friends? What kind of

friends, I wondered. Such people tire out their friends. Well, it wasn't my business. I didn't know what else to do. I felt very sorry, very useless. I shook hands and left them and I haven't seen them again nor heard of them.

Chapter 12

MARMADUKE would not be out of prison for nearly a week, so I went home and gave the dismal news to Helen. I tried to make light of it and, indeed, the thing in itself was a trifle; it was as part of a sequence that it mattered. She was burdened, and I must add to her burden. We didn't say much to one another; our understanding was deep enough. She spoke of Marmaduke without resentment. I had the thought that a nagging wife might have kept him in check—or driven him to despair. I didn't reproach her. She was anxious about little Richard who, obscurely, inexplicably, was an ailing child. She thought of going to Loughton to bring Marmaduke home, but she didn't want to leave Dick. Randal jocularly proposed that we should make up a party, but we were not in merry pin and he apologized for heavy-handedness.

I think we all thought of Marmaduke's home-coming from his long imprisonment. That had elements of excitement and hope that were absent now. Ultimately it was agreed that I should go. Randal said: "Why anybody?" But then I think an image of Marmaduke as a straying child in danger came to us all and he acquiesced.

Our poor Dick was anæmic and listless, puzzling the doctors. Helen and I stood by his bed and she

told him that when I came back Daddy would be with me. He reflected and then said: "Are Daddies always good?" It was cunningly impersonal.

Helen said: "Nobody is *always* good." And Dick said quickly: "You said Granfer was."

Helen looked at me and I was a little disconcerted. "Ah, well!" I said, "when you get old it isn't so easy to be bad. There's nothing bad that you want to do. And I'm not always good."

"She said so."

"She may think it because she loves me."

"Does she love you more than Daddy?"

I said "No."

"Do you love her more than Daddy?"

I said "Yes."

"We all love one another," Helen said.

"You can love people when they're not good, can't you?" said Dick.

"You rascal!" I said. "Your mother always loves you."

"That's it," he said, but he added: "Not if they're *very* bad."

"It makes it harder," said Helen.

He murmured: "He can't be *very* bad."

We affected not to hear. I think it was addressed to us, but he didn't want to be explicit. In his queer, diplomatic way he had appealed for reassurance. What had he heard? How could you prevent the children hearing? You couldn't segregate them, and there are such fools in the world.

I said: "Well, it's jolly to think we shall have

Daddy back again and he may stay quite a time now."

Gravely he said: "I am glad."

I suppose that all these poor children were learning discretion, reticence. We couldn't be frank with them. Marmaduke was more capable of it than any of us; he could, on occasion, be astonishingly open, and often provoked their curiosity. I think he gave them some rash and whimsical pictures of himself. And then, though neighbours or friends were usually careful, their children overheard things and passed them on to ours in mangled form.

I went to Loughton, made inquiries and awaited Marmaduke's appearance. I watched a heavy-looking door for some time on a drizzling morning and presently I was joined by a respectable-looking young woman. We stood together, in a shyness of sympathy, I think, and she glanced at me several times. Then she said: "You're not the missionary, are you?"

I told her I was waiting for a friend, and she said: "Eh, dear! A friend o' yours!" Then she added: "I don't know as missionaries 'll do my man much good."

We both watched the door constantly; it looked as though it would never open, but it did. Three men came out and, incredibly, Marmaduke was one of them. I couldn't remember afterwards whether he came out first, second or third. The strange thing was that he looked very much like the others at first. He, too, was tousled and depressed, and I was thankful that Helen was not there. The three separated without a word to one another, and I didn't like that,

though I suppose it was to be expected. The woman claimed her man and he gave a short, bitter laugh. They were gone in a moment. The missionary, as I supposed him to be, came hurrying up and, after glancing at Marmaduke and me, got hold of the third man, who seemed very shy of him. Marmaduke and I moved off together and I wasn't sure whether he was glad to see me or not. He said: "Very good of you. It puts me damnably in the wrong. Why didn't you bring a horse-whip?" The poor fellow was querulous. He looked up at the building. "A poor show, this," he said. "Anti-climax."

"That's the line you took with the magistrate, isn't it?" I said.

"Oh! I'm done, I'm done," he cried. "I repeat myself." He looked round with: "What's become of those other poor devils?"

I told him that a wife had claimed one and a missionary the other. "I suppose you're a kind of missionary, too," he said.

"Only a friend," I said.

He was silent for a time and then: "How did you know—did the papers report?"

I explained that I had heard from a policeman and mentioned the Erralls. "But when was this?" he exclaimed, and when he heard that I had been to Loughton twice he seemed touched by remorse. "Why do you do it?" he cried. "Why don't you let me go rip? I can't understand you. It's a kind of madness. Of course, there's Helen. I'm forgetting Helen."

"Yes, there's Helen, too," I said.

Presently he asked: "Did the Erralls say I was a bad actor?"

I said they didn't, though the word amateur had been mentioned, and there was some talk about technique.

"Oh! Technique, technique!" he said impatiently, "they're mad about it and it's mainly humbug. And yet I see that you can't carry things by storm. These people are the opposite to me. I can't stick at things, and they can spend their lives whipping that dead horse. Of course I admire them. I see the idea, but I get tired of it; I want another idea. My dear sir, you must have spent a small fortune. And what have you got for it?"

I suggested breakfast, as neither of us had fed adequately, and we turned into a small hotel, where they seemed surprised to see us. However, they did well for us with good coffee and bacon, so the situation improved. "I've such a despicable power of recovery," said Marmaduke. "I'm almost happy. Do you know, I was nearly happy in that jail just by remembering that I wasn't in for five years. Of course, I'm ashamed of myself. I have these primitive, ordinary feelings, though they get overlaid by worse stuff. Isn't it strange that you and I should be thrown together like this? Just by my marrying Helen. I shall see her again directly and those funny little children. I wish I could do something for you all. I wish I could give the family a treat."

"That's easy enough," I said.

"How?" he asked uneasily.

And I said, affably enough: "By being less of a damned fool for a time."

"Yes," said he, "you've every right to upbraid me." And then: "Why did you say 'for a time'? You think I can't possibly—carry it through?"

I looked at my watch and said it was time for us to move, as I had to call for my bag.

"You didn't take me to your hotel," he sneered.

I looked at him: "You wish me to explain why?"

"No, no," he said, "I oughtn't to have said that. I'm capable of small meannesses, petty resentments. They make me wretched, hopeless."

"When I mentioned 'for a time' just now," I said, "I was thinking of it in the narrow sense of a treat. I'm clumsy. I'm ready to trust you, to believe in your effort."

"I'm a brute if I don't respond," he said. "And you are only one. There's Helen and the babes. There's Randal—everybody. It's a ludicrous point of view, but you make it so hard for me. Didn't I say that once before? Yes, I repeat myself. I suppose that position of bootboy is still open?"

We travelled home comfortably, drearily; looking out of the window, reading newspapers, not talking much. Once he looked up and said, "Curious! This transfusion of blood from one person to another! I wonder if it's effectual."

I said that most of us preferred to get on with our own blood. We didn't pursue the subject, but I saw him take his penknife and cut out a paragraph.

Chapter 13

MARMADUKE made a quiet re-entry and we all tried to avoid any suggestion of calamity. We talked over the affair of the Erralls calmly, agreeing that that particular game was up. Marmaduke was humorous at their expense, but he said that they were first-rate of their kind; he didn't say what kind. One didn't like to acquiesce in positive failure, and I said something about possible openings on the stage elsewhere; my heart sank at the idea of renewing relations with the egregious Buckingham. But I found that Marmaduke considered his theatrical career to be closed. "You can't rush it," he said. "You want to electrify audiences right away, but the producer thinks of which leg you'll put out first and whether you go round the table or the chairs. With years of effort I might be middling. No; bootboy for me."

Helen went out to see Dick, and he followed her. They were away some time, and when they returned Helen said that Dick was asleep. They had been "looking at him." Helen was agitated, I could see, and presently Marmaduke went out to ask Dr. Hepworth to come round in the morning and have a good overhauling of Dick.

Hepworth came. He was one of the middle-aged men who retain triumphantly something of ardent

youth. He was friendly, jolly and very alert with Dick. The examination was a delightfully gay disguise of serious intent. Helen, Marmaduke and I were all there, and presently we went downstairs with Hepworth, whose final jokes with Dick were called out on the way.

He was, on the whole, reassuring. There was nothing organically, detectably wrong. Yet the boy wasn't strong, his power of recovery from slight ailments was disappointing. He wanted plenty of good food, good air, a fair amount of exercise—that kind of thing. The seaside? As you like, but Hepworth wasn't conventional about that. The air of Darley was good enough, though the winter might be a little bleak.

Marmaduke listened with some impatience and then: "He's anæmic?"

"Well, yes, I dare say," said Hepworth.

"He wants blood?"

Hepworth looked at him curiously: "There's some virtue in blood," he said.

And then Marmaduke sprang his scheme upon us. Transfusion of blood. That's what Dick wanted—what he was prepared to give. He was terribly in earnest; he wouldn't let Hepworth wave him aside. Hepworth was quite unprepared for such a proposal; he was discouraging, sceptical; he wouldn't be responsible. Marmaduke brought out his newspaper paragraph and read it with emphasis. Was there nothing in it? Hepworth wouldn't say that. Didn't he agree about the anæmia? Hepworth said it wasn't

an extreme case; it wasn't a case for a dangerous experiment.

"Danger to whom?" cried Marmaduke eagerly.

But Hepworth wouldn't pursue that. He clapped Marmaduke on the back. "Good father!" he said. "It isn't everybody who would——"

Marmaduke interrupted him. "Oh, don't make a fool of me! Take it seriously. Don't you know? Ask somebody. Who are the authorities? I want to do it."

Helen watched them, pale and speechless. She sought my eye, wanting an understanding with me; wanting, I suppose, my recognition of Marmaduke's heroism. I didn't feel quite ready for that; it all seemed unreal to me. Hepworth consented, under pressure from Marmaduke, to think it over, to keep an open mind as far as he could. He went away frowning.

And then we had Marmaduke in wild mood. "Helen consents," he cried. "It's obviously the right thing to do. These doctors are the most timid, conventional people alive. Little Dick, little Dick. The danger's trifling, Helen. None to him. What's against it? It's just the thing I can do. It's my chance, it's what I'm fit for. I give my blood to my child. Look at the idea of it! This is where I come in."

I said: "Yes, but you mustn't do it if it isn't necessary."

"Ah!" he said. "Listen to old sober-sides! Listen to the wisdom of the ages. And he lets me bleed

him. He likes it. Money—blood—where's the difference? Don't be selfish. Here's something for me. What a relief! What a help! Glorious! I can do it. Danger? But I want danger."

"Is this to be for you or for Dick?" I said.

It was a cruel deflation. He drooped under it. "I suppose I'm merely a fantastic wind-bag," he said. "The idea attracted me."

Helen spoke to me later. She shrank from the possibility of such an ordeal for Marmaduke, but the thought of it fascinated her and he had infected her with his enthusiasm. I told her that I was pretty sure Hepworth wouldn't countenance it.

He reported adversely, and by that time Marmaduke had almost abandoned the idea himself. I think this was in part because Randal had told him that there wasn't any risk in the operation. So Marmaduke hardly listened to Hepworth's explanations and we were all cold and dispirited.

But Helen told Dick about it. She thought it would extol his father, and it did. Dick listened with awe while Helen improved the occasion. I think the analogy was suggested with that mysterious Jesus who kept a benevolent eye on us from somewhere skywards. Was Daddy, then, as good as Jesus? Anyhow, he was "astrornarily good." And so it seemed to Helen.

Marmaduke went out that night and I think he visited several public-houses. He came home drunk. I had persuaded Helen to go to bed, and she knew why; she didn't want to see him while we were there. The poor fellow came in with a miserable swagger

that wasn't like him. Randal and I received him coldly, but he was talkative. One had to say something and I said: "This won't do."

He put out a deprecating hand. "Granted," he said. "Taken as read. Spare me the details. I appreciate"—but he found the pronunciation of the word rather too much for him and he stood there ridiculously practising it. After three or four attempts he proceeded, with an ineffable gesture. "Very well," he said, "I understand your attitude. It is familiar. It is perfectly correct. What is more interesting is *my* attitude. D'you 'preciate that?"

He appeared to be addressing Randal, who said: "Your attitude is that of a crazy fool."

"Conventional!" said Marmaduke. "Perf'ctly conventional. I've passed, on the whole, a pleasant evening."

"We haven't," said Randal.

"I regret it," said Marmaduke. "I regret it extremely. We're not simple enough in doing what we like. Why don't you go out and do something you like? You good men spend too much time by the hearth. A ring at the door-bell and you're lively again. Who is it? The village idiot? Well, that's better than nothing. Why didn't you go out to look for him? You're like me when I wanted the warder to bring my food. I wasn't hungry, but anything to break the damned monotony. It's only your dullness that keeps you virtuous. Be alive! Oh, be alive! Thank God! Helen's gone to bed."

He fell asleep in his chair. Randal and I sat watch-

ing him. We had ugly, desolating thoughts about him, I suppose. He looked almost innocent. He was marred, slightly tainted. We studied him intensely; we might have been waiting for a crisis to pass in his dangerous illness. We didn't seem to require anything more to occupy us. He filled our thoughts. There he sprawled, sodden, with glazed features; he didn't look his best. His face was not set in strong lines and yet I thought I could see the marks of what he had endured. A weak man forced to endure doesn't become a strong man. Somewhere far back in him you realized the boy. He hadn't been a happy boy.

I looked at Randal, who was intent upon him, and I thought I could see wistfulness, sentiment in Randal's gaze. Perhaps he was conscious of this for, meeting my eye, he said briskly: "Well, he keeps us entertained." We agreed upon that, and then helplessly, sluggishly, we went over some old ground about the value of the eccentric, the rebel, the disturbing element. Marmaduke awoke suddenly and without apparent cause. He looked quickly from one to the other of us and we were a little embarrassed when, frowningly, he said: "Well?"

I said: "We were considering you."

"Yes, I'm a bit of a problem for you," he said.

"Well, solve it! Solve it!" said Randal impatiently. "You're the only one that can."

"How?" he said sullenly.

"As a beginning, by not getting drunk."

His sleep had brought some gain of sobriety, per-

haps some loss of truculence. He said: "I hardly think I shall become a sot. It implies regular habits and I'm not good at those. I merely like a little pleasure now and then. Don't let us have prohibition. Think of the enormous amount of pleasure that alcohol gives. Has that occurred to these fanatics? Why shouldn't we cultivate our senses? As a spiritual world it's a failure."

Randal said: "It's time you stopped your foolery —made your effort."

"Effort!" he said. "But don't you see that in a man like me there's far more moral effort than in you safe, regular people? That's why there's more joy in Heaven over me. Sinning and repenting is a much bigger thing than virtuous consistency. I can't see that you have to make any moral effort at all. I congratulate you. But I am perpetually striving—occasionally, anyhow. Wasn't it William the Silent who never won a battle, but was always turning up again? That's like me. Yes, it's the bad people who are really the good ones."

We let him run on; we had got the habit of spending a good deal of time listening to his paradoxical utterances which, indeed, were considerably better fun for him than for us. He hadn't finished. "I suppose Hepworth was quite right," he said, "and I dare say you think it was just a theatrical display—my usual egoism. But I had a vision of it as strange and beautiful. I would give my blood to my child. I tell you I am capable of beauty. And I thought of making Dick strong again and of our all being so happy to-

gether—yes, all of us—you two, as well. It was to wipe out something of the long score against me. Then you tell me it isn't necessary, and that, anyhow, there's no danger. What good is it to me if there's no danger? I'm nervous, I'm timid, and that idea of blood-letting made me shudder, but I had a great emotion. I would have done it. No use. I don't seem to have luck."

We had nothing to say, though he looked at us with invitation or expectancy. So he went on: "Mind you, I'm not one of those who want just to live in their children. That's sentimental nonsense. I have my own life to live. That's what makes my impulse to help Dick so fine. I had to overcome a considerable reluctance. I was sustained by the idea. But I am afraid you are not interested."

He got up to go to bed and paused at the door. "Excuses, apologies, are tiresome," he said. "They may be taken for granted. Yes, on a big scale. Gratitude, too—as much as you like. I'm a damned nuisance anyway."

He went out with a tragic gesture. There was a courtesy of farewell in it, but more of the relegation of himself to infernal regions.

Chapter 14

MARMADUKE was affably jocose about what he called our efforts to save his soul and he assured us that he took an intelligent interest in it. "You may have deep, obscure plans," he said, "though usually you spread the net in sight of the bird. Conscientiously, I do my best to walk into it. But what's the latest idea?"

"Society," said Randal. "We're good of our kind, but we don't give you scope. You want more people. Variety."

"Well, then," he said. "Why won't you let me go to the public-house where I can get it?"

Randal said: "That isn't variety. You're with the same miserable set of soakers every evening."

"They're different at each pub," he said. "I must go the round." He was always ready for a preposterous argument.

Of course the social position wasn't easy, but some people were aggressively liberal and ready to claim Marmaduke as a brother. Of course we didn't want to force him on anybody and at a hint of coldness to him we were ready to freeze. Yet it's only decent to give people a chance to be decent and Marmaduke must have distractions. It happened that in the fine autumn weather some people conceived the idea of a garden-party and to this "everybody" was invited, includ-

ing Mr. and Mrs. Abney. Marmaduke went through phases from contempt to complacency and settled down to something like pleasurable anticipation. He had the gift of prominence even without his peculiar qualification, he liked a wide stage, and a bad eminence was better than none. Helen had expressed the family wish that he should be careful and he went determined to avoid any flamboyant indiscretion. I watched him dispensing his slightly ironical politenesses, with approval.

And then came disaster. He overheard a jocular, supercilious reference to himself as the jailbird. Young Lister—a cubbish fellow—considered "Sorry. Didn't know you were there," an adequate apology, but Marmaduke flamed out at him. They were rolling over together on a flower-bed when I came up and helped to separate them. It was a deplorable incident and the general agreement was that it had ruined the party. Small talk was difficult and clock golf tame after this. Still, the claret-cup was good and there was something in Marmaduke's subsequent contention that he had put some life into the party, had made it memorable. Fortunately Helen did not see the scrimmage. She came as Marmaduke was making a formal speech of apology to his hostess. He did it too neatly; I think he enjoyed that part. I gave her a hurried hint of the position. Marmaduke withdrew with a flourish and Helen took his arm. It was all a little stagy. Randal and I remained a short time to handle the shattered amenities. Randal confessed to me as we walked home that he dreaded being bored by

Marmaduke over this affair. Poor Marmaduke! Was he sinking to that?

There was no evading the subject. Randal told him to be philosophical over trifles. "Trifles!" he cried. Who does not hate to be robbed of a grievance?

"What else?" said Randal with acerbity. "Fellows like Lister exist. You know that. You know that what he said is well within his range. If you didn't hear it you might infer it. Do face the facts."

But Marmaduke wasn't going to give up his opportunity. Lister was some kind of business man and therefore a rogue. Analyse what you call your honesty! He appealed to an imaginary adversary. The crowning charge was that these business men weren't amusing. He was on the verge of humour. Then he turned to Helen. "Are you on my side?" he said. "Are you still on my side? You would like a little more quiet respectability. No wonder. What about an example to the children? That's the weak link; that's the place where we shall break asunder.

"I must do you justice," he continued. He turned to Randal and me: "She was rather wonderful when she walked home with me from that blasted garden-party—blasted's good, don't you think? It's jolly to get the right word now and then. Yes, she walked with her arm in mine, only saying little things and radiating faithfulness. So it seemed. She doesn't utter reproaches, doesn't look them. And yet she doesn't miss anything. That's terrible. She sees me all the time."

We all gazed at Helen as she sat there, a figure of inscrutable benignity, mending the children's clothes.

"Yes," said Marmaduke, "she takes everything in and gives nothing out. The worst of Helen is that she hasn't infinite variety. There are times when I think I might have got on better with Cleopatra. Oh! I can reverence Helen with any of you—before any of you. The faithful wife! The good mother! She's magnificent on her plane. She becomes monumental. I can't do with it all the time. I can't be steady in idealism like you virtuous bourgeois. Nor in conduct. What a fool I was this afternoon! And what a chance I missed for something delicately ironical! Deuce take it! That garden was a good setting—the flowers and the women's frocks and everybody a bit startled except me. I mismanaged it."

We had nothing to say. We were perpetually in the position of having nothing to say. And now Marmaduke went on: "Of course I can't see much in stoicism, can you? Perpetual benignity is very much the same. I don't want you to work your faces about as they do at the movies, but the repression of emotion is absurd. It makes such a dull world. Helen, why don't you quarrel with me sometimes? You'd do it grandly. Like rolling thunder. I get bored, you know, like the man who trod on the lion's tail."

Helen bent over her work and he perceived that she was crying. He sprang to his feet. He stood over her, before her, looking down, as it seemed, on the crown of her head. I think he had a delicacy about investigating her face. He was stiff with re-

morse. He muttered: "A brute! A common brute." He whispered: "Forgive me."

Helen gathered her work together, patted his shoulder and went out of the room. He hastened to open the door for her and watched her mounting the stairs. Then he came back and asked Randal for a cigarette. Thoughtfully he said: "Even if you're a bit fantastical you keep getting back to simple humanities."

Randal said: "You're the man who always wants to uproot himself to see how he's growing."

"I thought that was the way," Marmaduke said, but he didn't pursue the subject. He fell silent and soon he was sleeping in his chair like a tired child. Randal and I watched him again, and as he was not drunk I think we both felt that things were better if not easier.

Chapter 15

We determined to make a literary man of Marmaduke, or at any rate a free-lance journalist. Surely, we agreed—and he agreed—it could be done. He was a clever fellow; he didn't write badly and could certainly improve. He might send articles about; start a novel, an epic, a play—anything he liked. He took up the idea eagerly. We mustn't expect too much at first, but still—Helen began to make penwipers and produced enough to last us all for a decade. Marmaduke went to Manchester to procure the right sort of paper pads, and we all contributed to a new fountain pen. "But where am I to write?" he said.

It is a curious fact that I haven't a study. I am a literary man of sorts, but I write on vacant corners of tables or on mantelpieces or in my bedroom. I'm supposed to have a desk, but everybody uses it. We once had a visitor, a lady, who cried out: "This is the most extraordinary household I've seen. You are literary folk, and the only pen I can find won't write, the blotting-paper's a disgrace, and you don't seem to know about penwipers"; this, of course, was before Helen's ministrations, and before fountain pens became so common. We were careless about those matters, and our friend attributed it to superiority. I'm afraid she suspected affectation.

But here was Marmaduke waiting to make a proper start and he must have apparatus; he must have the momentum that this would bring. Otherwise nothing might occur. He admitted that it would be absurd for him to have a study when I hadn't one—"And what about me?" interjected Randal—but something must be done for him; he was not, like me, aloft and above material considerations. So the dressing-room in which he slept was fitted up into a respectable imitation of a study, and the bed was made to look as near a couch as possible. We all regarded the arrangements with satisfaction, and Marmaduke proposed to make a start almost immediately. But, by the by, a start at what?

He consulted us all about that. He lived, as he said, very much in the public eye; it was a sympathetic public of three. And, of course, we couldn't do anything. With all the sympathy in the world a time must come when you tackle your own job, look into your own soul, or fly with your own wings. He was sociable and he seemed to require constant stimulation. He didn't know what to write about, though he projected ideas. "Prison experiences are the thing," he said. "I grasp my nettle." He recalled *The Shropshire Lad* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol.* "But my line," he said, "will be prose of an extraordinarily sombre cast."

Randal suggested that public and publishers would have to be considered, and he agreed that we must be practical. What about suburban humours under the title "Our Village" or "Our Suburb"? Perhaps

the *Herald* would take a series of articles on "Manchester Windbags." He could write something pretty stinging. I said that people didn't want to be stung, that they preferred to be tickled, to which he said that when your friend was stung it came through to you in the form of a tickle. However—the thing was to get into touch with a lot of papers and magazines. By the by, he hadn't any large envelopes.

Poor Marmaduke! We looked on him as on a hen that is expected to lay, that ought to lay. He got into the way of going up to his room after breakfast, when it had been straightened, and sometimes he took the newspaper with him. One morning—it was a Sunday and Randal was at home—he came down again very soon and demanded a hint, a theme, some kind of stimulus. We did our best, but didn't hit upon anything inspiring till Randal spoke of an old dispute with a friend about the respective merits of Oxford and Cambridge and the Cambridge man's contention that his town had the more sinister back-alleys. "That's the ticket," cried Marmaduke and was off to his room. He did produce a piece of sorts and suggested that the *Herald* might like to have it. I was frowning over it and looked up to see his eagerness turning to disappointment. "It's full of awful hints," I said.

He replied with some complacency: "You see that? Well, I suppose art is the avoidance of the specific."

"Do you think a respectable daily paper would take this?" I said. He entered upon some explanation of the difference between immoral and unmoral, to which

I hardly listened. We did get an article or two into the *Herald* and there was quite a family fuss about it. We wanted to believe that the problem was solved and that he would go on writing more and more, better and better. He was disposed to rest on moderate accomplishments. I dare say they cost him a good deal of labour. He was an amateur, an improvisor; he didn't like recasting and revising and taking pains; he wanted to be a genius by first intention. There seemed to be a fair prospect of his making about £20 a year. He said that for a talent like his it was necessary to wait for inspiration, for the appropriate mood. Drudgery, regular habits of writing were demoralizing. By all means give yourself a chance. So he retired to his room to smoke cigarettes, with great regularity. Randal and I contended that more than this was necessary; that you must control your mind to work, meet inspiration half-way, do something every day, every hour.

He came down to us triumphantly. "Listen to this!" he cried. "Listen to these sentences: 'A charming damsel with a wealth of magnificent auburn hair' —'He reeled against the mantelpiece with a look of terror in his eye'—'The eternal stars maintained their perpetual vigil.' What d'you think of those?" he said.

We were puzzled and asked him to read them again. Randal said he didn't see the point, and I asked whether we were expected to admire.

"Admire!" shouted Marmaduke. "The point is that it's the sort of rubbish I write when I force

myself to it. 'Wealth of magnificent'—God forgive me."

"Do you mean to say that these three sentences come out of one article you've written?" said Randal shrewdly.

"That doesn't matter," Marmaduke said. "They serve for illustration."

"You've concocted them for us, you old humbug," said Randal.

"But they're the kind of thing," persisted Marmaduke. His spirits had fallen. "I suppose I've failed again," he said. We hastened to assure him that he hadn't, that he was at the promising start.

"Failure, failure, failure!" he said. "What a relief to you all if I disappeared! I look round for something to do, some direction to take. And there's only one thing in the world at this moment that has any attraction for me."

"What's that?" I said.

"To go out and get drunk."

"And that you can't do," said Randal.

"Why not? It's easy. It's luxuriously easy. I know there are reasons against it—decency, honour, everything. But what are reasons against a craving that overwhelms you? It's not possible to argue with a flood."

I said: "You shall have a bottle of beer for your dinner."

"And a large whisky-and-soda afterwards?" he said. "Ignoble compromise. You're so material. My revolt has a moral element. One gets drunk as a pro-

test against this hard world. It's an aspiration to a better."

"What's up with the world?" Randal said, but I think we both felt the hopelessness of our stolidities against this flimsy, fantastical creature.

"I'm the world," he said. "I'm the only world I know. And I could turn and rend myself. Yes, there is another thing to do. But it's serious. We won't talk about that."

"What do you mean?" I said sternly.

"A family man has his responsibilities," he said. "I'm the father of four children. There won't be any more; don't fear that. What is best for the family? Stay at home, keep sober, work away. I know. I also know what I am. I frequently do the right thing. I do right oftener than wrong. But I play the fool. My justification would be to do splendid things occasionally and so come out right on the average. I do make stupendous efforts—ten minutes at a time. A thoroughly efficient community would put me in the lethal chamber."

"What a colossal egoist you have become!" said Randal.

"Always have been," he said. "I think we all are, but I'm not canny about it. Yet I have impulses. The children—these four babes—will——"

"Must we call in Helen to hear this?" said Randal. I perceived a change in Randal. He was losing patience.

"Ah, Helen!" Marmaduke said. "Dare I speak of Helen? You say I'm an egoist. Well, the egoist

does bare his soul. He's not like you close self-contained people. You must be a boiling mass of egoism within. I have my volcanic vents. Yes; do you know, I sometimes think that Helen culminated when I went to prison. Her steadfastness, her loyalty. It was a great episode. And she goes on and on. That's the damnable thing about this world: it continues after you've got things right; it's all anti-climax. I'm afraid of Helen. What is behind that wonderful mask? Is she infinitely tolerant? Will the façade disintegrate slowly or crack suddenly? I suppose she has a kind of affection for me. I'm one of her children now. She wants to take pride in me as a brilliant boy. I try her too much, and yet I shall try her more."

"Why?" said Randal. "What you see you can prevent."

"What you see is what is there," he said.

"What particular crime do you mean?"

"You want it in plain terms?" said Marmaduke. "I'll tell you what I see. I shall have drinking bouts. I may run after women. I shall insult and disgust you all. I shall fail and fail. I shall be a bad example to my children—a spectacle for their scorn. I shall taint their lives. Perhaps they are tainted already for they are partly me. I don't want to harm them. I should like to redeem—I like the idea of redemption. To clear off all accumulations in one gigantic effort!"

"The chance doesn't come in real life," said Randal. "You'd better make up your mind for a steady spell of doing your best."

"Unfortunately I've clear sight," said Marmaduke.

"Then if you have no will of your own you must do as you are told," said Randal.

"Ah! You begin to show your teeth. At last."

"Put yourself in our place," I said. "What would you do?"

He waved that aside. "Coercion! In what form? Will you drag me out of pubs?"

"I wouldn't stop at that," Randal said.

"But a scandal would be worse for you than for me."

"About equal."

"For Helen?"

"Doesn't it strike you that the scandal's there already?"

"The reactions on Helen will be very curious," said Marmaduke.

"You try our patience very far," said Randal.

"I'm coming up against something hard again, am I?" said Marmaduke. "My life is alternately too soft and too hard. I don't choose the hard things, but perhaps you forget that I've endured more than any of you. The way of transgressors is hard. We're the martyrs. Yes, I suppose it's childish to look for a first-rate job in self-sacrifice—something that would be all over in a moment. There's suicide—but to threaten that is bad form."

"Suicide?" I cried.

"Well, naturally, it crosses my mind sometimes. What kind of a man is he who never thinks of suicide? When you read of some poor devil who tried to simplify things that way you say to yourself: What

should I have done—given those circumstances? I always put it to myself so. Don't you?"

Randal shrugged impatiently and Marmaduke went on: "Of course one speculates about nice ways of doing it and it's hard to find one. An overdose of a narcotic? That seems most civilized, but we're getting soft. The high Roman way must have been difficult, and gas-pipes are lower-middle class. There's always that awkward moment when you wish you hadn't done it."

"What should make you think of suicide?" I said.

"Well," Marmaduke said, "there's a certain symmetry about the idea. And you break off from the feast. You don't drink and gorge till you fall under the table."

"It's difficult to respect you, to tolerate you," cried Randal, "when you talk like this. Is it fair to us? Is it fair to Helen?"

"What?" said Helen. She had entered quietly.

Chapter 16

I SUPPOSE we looked like conspirators. Helen waited for an answer and we were not quite sure what she had heard.

"Our usual pastime of baiting poor Marmaduke," I said with a guilty lightness, and she turned to Randal with "What is it?"

"It was nothing of importance," said he.

"But it was," she said. "You don't speak like that for nothing." She looked at Marmaduke. "Please!" she said.

"We were discussing," he said, "in an abstract way the question of suicide."

"Why should that not be fair to me?" she said.

"You had better ask Randal," said Marmaduke. "I might have asked him the same question."

"Randal?"

"Well," said Randal, "I protested because he makes a grave matter into a light one. It was, as he says, an abstract discussion, but I didn't like the way. Don't imagine that we were talking of any one in particular."

I said: "You know by this time, Helen, that he has a certain rashness of tongue."

She looked from one to the other of us as we spoke. Then she concentrated on Marmaduke. "I

am not to be left out," she said, "I am not a fool. Of course I know that you must have thought of it."

I think we were all startled. Marmaduke looked at her quickly and then I met his inquiring eyes.

"So there is no need to leave me out," said Helen.

"This is altogether too serious, too portentous," I said. "Every man thinks of suicide at some time. Not Marmaduke more than another. We're not keeping anything back, really."

"But Marmaduke is pushed to it two ways," said Helen. "If we are unkind to him he thinks: Why should I live? And if we are kind: Why should I live to be a burden to them?"

"Are we unkind to him?" said Randal.

"No, no, no," said Marmaduke. "You're all wonderfully lenient to me. I fail and fail and you all stand round, taking the most intelligent interest. Helen has been my stay and comfort. She has been watching me and wondering whether I shall commit suicide. How interesting that is!"

I cried out in protest and yet she had surprised me. Marmaduke said to her directly, intimately: "Would that be the best way out for me?"

"Oh, no!" she said, but she said it gently.

"What is in your mind?" said Marmaduke.

"I am thinking," she said, "that you are not the only one; that you don't come first."

"Ah!" said he, "the tigress and her cubs."

She looked at him steadily: "They come first," she said.

"Yes, I see that," said he. "I used to come first. I don't know how long it has been an illusion, but it used to be a kind of support to me. All those years I thought of you with emotion. I've thought of you romantically—in prison, in my cell, I mean. Yes, and a staunch, affectionate woman. You've always made allowances for me. You haven't demanded too much. We've lived a life of a sort. Now—but suppose this: Suppose that I had been a capital, cheerful person who never did wrong, would it have made the difference? Or if I had kept on being a hero of romance? For wasn't I that once? You found strangeness and beauty in me, Helen. Yes, you did. To marry me was a splendid adventure. I must believe that. Now—of course I understand. We fall away, we men—husbands, lovers. We become part of the furniture. It simplifies it for you that I'm a bit of a scoundrel. And yet, poor Helen, poor woman, the time must come when you won't come first with them. You'll fall away in your turn. The implacable march of events. You should have stuck to me. The old folk come together again when the children have gone. We might have been faithful old dodderers."

Helen listened to him patiently. Randal and I remained silent.

"They come first," said Marmaduke harshly. "What's the practical point?"

She didn't speak and he went on: "I'm a bad father? To be kept out of their way? Have I done them any harm? After all, I have contributed a certain

gaiety, a sparkle. The value of the solid virtues is exaggerated. But I'm becoming trivial. That's the worst of my style; I slip into the trivial."

He left the room, turning at the door to give us these assurances: "I shall not get drunk—to-day. I shall not commit suicide this week."

We sat silent for some time. It wasn't easy to say anything illuminating, and we shrank from the big platitudes which might have been opportune. I had on my tongue a sentence beginning: Is it possible that he might be driven—but it didn't seem helpful to utter it. I looked at Helen covertly. She had gone through that subtle and great change from the bride to the mother and she was capable now, it might be, of fanaticism for her children. She was a mysterious person, but I could tell her, slightingly, that she was merely inarticulate. Wives who have children change, and there isn't a corresponding change in the husbands; they may, if they are good fellows, become the big boys of the family. Marmaduke accomplished this in part and occasionally; he saw a good deal of the children, he romped a little with them, discussed more; he invented whimsical relations, cultivated audacities. But, all the time, it was his own life that he was living.

And what, as Marmaduke said, was the practical point? Clearly he was not the ideal father, but could she really believe that he would corrupt his children? Behave yourself, she might say. Hands off those precious children or—or what? He is a sensitive man and you can play on his nerves. I have fancies, I

suppose it is part of my work to give fancies their chance. Well, then, might not a terrible drama develop?

I addressed myself to Helen. What was in her mind? I suggested that we must be very careful with Marmaduke; that he mustn't be driven to desperation. Where are we heading? What effect would it have on him to know that this idea of suicide had been present in her mind? And that it could remain there without causing any conspicuous disturbance?

"You may have ceased to love him," I began.

"I have not ceased to love him," she said. And then, thoughtfully, "I think not."

"To me," I said, "Marmaduke's death would be a terrible misfortune. Would it not be so to you?"

My voice, I realized, had the tone of accusation. She was shaken, she hastened to agree. She was almost normal, almost reassuring. And yet I didn't understand her. She was inarticulate, and can the inarticulate be intellectually honest? Hardly to a high degree.

She went away to find Marmaduke; to reason with him, I suppose, to scout that idea of suicide, to make whatever concession of affection and tenderness was possible. Randal and I, left together, didn't feel it necessary to regard the talk of suicide very seriously. Randal, indeed, was contemptuous; he didn't believe in it at all. I found myself fearing Randal's harshness—or, should I say, his justice? I was old, tired, kind, ready to muddle on. I thought that I could make a case for Marmaduke yet; I suppose it would be his

own case considerably pruned. "And isn't he better than the conventional stodgy father?" I put it to Randal, to the liberal, clear-sighted Randal. He said: "The question is what he'll be presently." And I could see him as a perpetual dreary problem. Doubtless his descent, his degradation, would be mitigated by the vivacity of his own comments.

Eyeing me curiously, Randal said: "I think the question is what's best for Helen." And Randal, I see, has it in his mind that I—even I—am disposed to think of Helen second. Miserably I ask myself if I am capable of a deep disloyalty. Values are changing. And must you not think first of the most unfortunate one?

Randal is for strong measures if it must be. What measures? If Marmaduke won't behave himself he must be turned out. I think that severity to his friend would hurt Randal terribly, and I admire his ruthlessness of the clear brain. I can't face that idea of turning Marmaduke out, I can't feel it to be right. Helen would be torn two ways, I suppose; in any struggle the children would prevail. I suppose I hold the key to the economic position.

We were not at a desperate pass yet, but nothing, Randal said, could prevent the position going worse. I put it to him plainly that if we drove Marmaduke too far he might cut his throat, and Randal said: "We must face that." These young people have a passion for facing things. They are enamoured of clear thinking, and so every problem must be faced and solved. They would not have them peter out;

it is "woolly" to let sleeping dogs lie. Then Randal said: "He's about as likely to cut his throat as Hamlet was."

And looking out of the window, we saw Marmaduke, in his old garden coat, industriously, virtuously hoeing. Problem? It appeared that there wasn't a problem, or, at any rate, that some kind of second-rate solution was possible. It may not be exhilarating for middle-class children to have a handy-man for a father, but that's better than a suicide. How simple all would be if Marmaduke could be content with a quiet life on the land—on about half an acre of land! But of course it couldn't be.

Chapter 17

THERE was some perversity in his attitude to the children; he puzzled them with his scepticisms and audacities. Helen had brought them up straitly. She was afraid to stray beyond certain of the safe conventions, for she hadn't a strong faith in herself nor in a world without surveillance. Marmaduke revolted weakly and discursively. He wanted them to discuss their Jesus with him, and said that he was ready to learn from babes and sucklings. Helen was uneasy and he became ironical with her. He talked about intellectual honesty almost heavily. "Don't let us make these children secretive," he said. "Don't make sham mystics of them. Let them formulate this Jesus; let's go into it with them."

Helen was uneasy, she was even alarmed. She didn't want intellectual honesty, she wanted customary pieties. I was present one day when Marmaduke was questioning and stimulating little Randy, and Helen came in. She did betray some suspicion, and Randy, quick to appreciate her mood, became very difficult with his father. To some question he said: "Perhaps it is better not to talk about this."

"You see? You hear?" cried Marmaduke. "They are trained to dishonesty. They turn against me."

And Helen's reply to that was: "You shall not corrupt them."

They flashed these words at one another and they were, it seemed to me, far in excess of the situation. And yet Marmaduke went farther; in his exasperation he said to Helen: "You are too stupid to be honest." It was dreadful. Everything seemed shaken. And Marmaduke, trembling, buried his face in his hands. He tried to control his sobs, he muttered "Helen! Helen!" and then: "I shouldn't have said that. I don't believe it. I don't mean it. I tell you it was a horrible suggestion that came to me. I couldn't help saying it. Randy, I was tempted by the devil." And Randy, smug little prig, said—looking at his mother, currying favour with his mother—"You mustn't say wicked things." Marmaduke laughed bitterly; it was hardly laughter, but rather a kind of crowing. The strange thing is that I was on his side. Helen took Randy away with her and I felt that she should have said something kind to Marmaduke. That she didn't was the most serious thing of all. Incredulously I watched her go out. Marmaduke, swift to perceive, interpret, infer, touched my arm. "No, no, no," he said. "Don't blame her. It's I, it's all my fault. And now I come between you. It's time to give in, it's time to go."

I was feebly deprecating; I really hadn't much fault to find with him over this. But I appealed to him to be generous with Helen and he was eagerly contrite. I said: "You make a fuss about things you really don't care about." He wouldn't have this. "I'm a man of moods, of course," he said, "but I do care about things in my own way, I come back to them.

I don't just go on stodging. About those kids and Jesus now—oh, but let's forget that."

Marmaduke hadn't a settled money allowance. I proposed it, but he waved it aside. He didn't like fixed conditions. He said it would be impossible to fix a salary for a bootboy who didn't clean the boots. He asked me for money when he wanted it, and he wasn't unconscionable. One day, rather to my surprise, he asked me for five pounds and said he had a scheme. It was merely to take the three elder children to see "Peter Pan." He gave them lunch and tea handsomely, and when he came home with them he wasn't quite sober. I can't excuse it; there isn't an excuse; he set me speculating on that idea of possession by the devil. He played with ideas of duality, of faith that had nothing to do with works, of a spirit that wouldn't take the body seriously. Randy, watching him, puzzled, asked me why Daddy talked so queerly; I said that clever men had kinds of fun that boys didn't understand. He nodded thoughtfully. "But Mother *is* better than Daddy whatever she says?" It was hardly an interrogation. Helen had been generous, the trouble had blown over, one tried to think of it as merely a gust of words. I didn't know what had passed between them. He could never give her what now she so much wanted—safety, stability, the proper brand of parental virtues.

Marmaduke said he wanted to take Randy to "Hamlet"; he wanted to see the effect of it on a young mind. With mock humility he asked me if I had any objection to his talking to Randy about Shake-

speare. Or would I consider it a reasonable compromise? "You know, Randy," he said, "most of us are a bit like Hamlet."

"Are you?" said Randy.

"Particularly me. I'm him, sometimes."

"How?"

"You see, Hamlet wanted to do things and he never got them done."

"Why didn't he?"

"Ah! That's it: the difference between doing a thing and not doing it. That's Hamlet."

"Why couldn't he do it?"

"He had cause and will and strength and means," cried Marmaduke, "and he just went on talking—like me."

"What did he want to do?" said Randy.

"To kill his stepfather."

"That's wicked."

"Not for him. Goodness isn't the same for everybody."

"Have you a goodness of your own?"

"I wonder if that's it," said Marmaduke.

"Do you want to kill somebody?" said Randy.

"There's one person I might kill some day," said Marmaduke.

"Stop!" I said. "This won't do."

I met Randy's horrified eyes. "Is Daddy wicked?" he said.

"No," I said, "but he's rather naughty sometimes in saying things he doesn't mean. I understand him; but it's puzzling for little boys."

Marmaduke began sullenly, "I ought to do things, I can do them, I want to do them, and I don't do them."

He ended querulously, his voice sharpened to a cry, he shook his fist in the air. Randy stared at him, edging away. Marmaduke said to me: "He is alienated from me. I have lost him."

We came to a bad time. Randal tried his forcible methods; he penetrated to bars, he dragged Marmaduke out of them. It was a public scandal. I don't know how far the physical struggle went; Randal hated to talk about it. And then the two would behave to one another with sad courtesy, they groped after their old friendship, they made concessions, they were both touchingly magnanimous. Yes, I watched it with pain and admiration. Of course I made the obvious remonstrances with Marmaduke and he was disarmingly in agreement. I suppose I should have towered over him compellingly. I grow old and soft and sympathetic, I see things too clearly, I yield too readily to the hopeless, the immovable.

Yet Marmaduke did annoy me. We were all in league against him, to help him. I got tired of his dark references to Sydney Carton, of his wild warnings. The emotional scene became a little jaded. Marmaduke was guilty of repetition. Half-drunk, he would discourse to me of the Fates closing round him: the Fates in the forms of devoted friends, a loving wife, charming children. "Helen," he says, "is like one of those creatures in a popular science book—ants are they? Bees? They carry on their

allotted work, they are a kind of *petite vitesse* in evolution. She's all instinctive, she's a mother, she's pre-Ibsen. I'm the useless male that should be put out of the way."

According to my mood I replied to him in the vein of "My poor boy," or of "You damned young fool." And he reverted with a sort of politeness to our goodness to him, our long-suffering. Sometimes it had emotion in it, sometimes it was little more than a polite formula. One tired of it. I got tired of hearing that Helen is not romantic, that she's like the Venus of Milo, that she lacks sinfulness. I didn't like to suggest to Marmaduke that he was becoming a bore; any hint of that made him wince. I believed that he was capable of sacrificing himself for his children, but that Helen should stimulate him to it would rouse his resentment. And yet one day he said to me: "Rather fine, you know, Helen's throwing me over like this. It's like Falstaff and Prince Henry —'I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.' Austere fellow, Shakespeare. I mean he could hit the note. Why! Helen and I once——"

"Ridiculous analogy," I said. "Helen has never thrown you over."

"No more than she had to do," he said. "I've no complaints to make."

One night I lay awake in my bed thinking backward and forward, wishing for sleep, wishing for the morning light. Marmaduke slept in the room above me and I heard him moving about. I became alert for I was perpetually on the verge of anxiety. He seemed

to be pacing about and I couldn't divine any intention in his movements. At last I felt that I must go up and see what he was doing; after delay and delay I put on my dressing-gown hastily and went to him. He didn't reply to my gentle tapping and so I turned the handle and looked in. He seemed to be watching the door and he saw me at once. He hadn't put on a dressing-gown though it was a cold night. He took my arm and drew me into the room. He didn't wait for any explanations or give any. "It can't go on," he said eagerly. "I see that it's quite impossible." I insisted that he should put on slippers and dressing-gown, and, as I helped him into this, he continued: "In the night I see things clearly. I couldn't rest. I must bring this to an end."

"My dear boy," I said, "what are you talking about? Bring what to an end?"

"You're too much on my side," he said. "The dreadful thing is that I'm alienating you from Helen; Randal too; I'm wrecking the whole thing. Ah, those old days! I used to watch you and Helen jealously. You were my only rival. I feared none but you. And I broke in upon it, though I saw how beautiful it was. You and Helen. Oh, I know, I understood more than you thought. It had to be. I knew that, and I saw that you knew it. You must fight for yourself sometimes. And I gave Helen what you couldn't. She had her excursion into romance. We've lived that down. What are we to do—we men who can be lovers and are incapable as husbands? The world changes and you steadfast people wouldn't have it so.

The children came, and it was for me to become the faithful father, the family man. I'm not made that way. I can be affectionate—at times. I can sacrifice. I tell you I can sacrifice. If I fail in everything else, I won't in that. I've spoilt everything."

I said: "No, no. You've helped to make my life extraordinarily interesting."

"My dear man," he cried, "what nonsense you talk! Interesting! I bring you miseries—agonies—and you would take them blandly, call them interesting. This is affectation, isn't it?"

"You'll get your effect yet," I said. "You are getting it?"

Puzzled, incredulous, he said: "Whatever do you mean?"

What did I mean? I was taking refuge in artistic jargon. Gallantly I attempted to rationalize it. I told him of a novel I reviewed, and as one read it appeared that it was failing obviously. There may be an element of despicable relief to the reviewer in this; it makes his job a simple one. But here I began to perceive that it wasn't all futility: much was wrong, but I said to myself: "Confound this fellow! He's getting his effect after all." It may not be my way, it may not be the world's way, but he's saving his own soul or half-saving it; he's being interesting."

"Did he get that effect in a flash?" said Marmaduke. "Was it a sudden inspiration? Did he unexpectedly save his bacon? But you're leading me away. You're distracting me, as you do a child, with stories. What comfort is there for me in all this? I shall

get a lot of effects, I dare say, and I shall give you some. Of course there's a certain interest in viewing one's own decline. You may make some attempt to save the ship, but at last you push off, rest on your oars, watch her burn and sink. It's amusing to regard yourself as a spectacle. Well, you've worked me round to the trivial, the grandiose. I was ready to be serious with you."

"Will you make me a promise?" I said.

"Who am I to make promises?" he said bitterly.

"Your promise is good enough for me."

"I don't know that there's much need for a promise," he said. "I've no intention of cutting my throat or anything of that kind. Why must I promise? I hate promising."

And then there was a knock at the door and Helen came in. I tried not to feel a shamefaced conspirator before her, but I didn't know what to say, how to go on. I said something feeble about sleeplessness; timorously I indicated the possibilities of evasion. Helen said: "What is it? What are you doing?"

Marmaduke took her arm and led her to a seat on the bed. "It's the perpetual discussion," he said. And then: "Soon or late, Helen, we must fail, we must disappear. When that time comes don't think that all which went before is lost. We've had that, we've been together, we've had good times. Not all you deserve, my poor girl. Don't think of me as just a bad lot. Remember our best"—she breathed a faint "Yes, yes"—"Everything ends and we've come to the end."

They sat together hand in hand. It appeared that she had nothing to propose, no question to ask. I said: "Have you some practical step in your mind?" My thoughts were straying vaguely to the colonies; inconvenient, incompetent people are shipped off to the colonies.

He said: "I must think about that," and I suppose that both Helen and I felt that this was all in a piece with his vacillations and half-intentions, that things would go on as they were and worse. But there is an idealism of the night and we sat there vaguely in sympathy, shivering a little, reluctant to part, out of love with the garish day. Marmaduke, bolder and more impressionable than we, quoted "Let us but love each other," and my mind travelled back to the old days of his crime when we three were united in affection. Was it a final appeal? Helen was gentle, inarticulate, inscrutable. He turned to look at her and then, whimsically, he looked at me and quoted again, this time from my old sonnet, "Straining a little warmth from dying fires." That was it; that was all.

Helen and he parted tenderly and I saw in this the refinements of courtesy, some wistfulness over the past. I went downstairs after her. She nodded to me and went into the room where Randy and Dick slept together. Turning I saw Marmaduke at the head of the stairs looking down. I waved my hand to him. Then I thought of telling him to go into the boys' room after her. One would stave off calamity with little dodges and precautions. But now the hopelessness, the negation of the night had descended upon me.

Chapter 18

MARMADUKE asked me for the loan of a hundred pounds and I stared at him, wondering whether he was serious. I said "What for?" and he said, "Well, fifty then," as though the reduction to half would serve for an answer. At last he said: "I want it to go away with," and I said "Go away? Where? For how long? Why?"

"I believe I mean to go away for ever," he said. "I don't like to talk big about it because I have just that slight fear that I might come creeping back. I don't think I should, but how can you know what you'll do when you go out into the unknown? I should have gone away without saying anything, but you can't disappear comfortably without a bit of money. You think that when the money's gone I shall come back. I think not; if I could be sure of anything I should be sure not. And yet I suppose I shall sink rapidly, I shan't last long. It's a kind of suicide."

"I won't give you a penny for such a purpose," I said.

"I shall be sorry to lose you," he said, "but we can't go together."

"You can't go alone," I said.

"Alone! That's it," he said. "I'm going to be

alone. It won't be the first time. I've got a thread of tenacity, I believe. It will be interesting to find out more about that."

"What can you do? How will you live?" I cried.

"It isn't necessary to live. That's the point."

"You are not serious."

"For once, I am serious."

"You would leave"—and I hesitated—"your children?"

"They would turn against me."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Fault? Fault?" he said. "What's the good of talking about fault?"

He irritated me. "Try to help us," I said. "Do your part."

"You are right," said he; "we are agreed."

"We'll find a billet for you yet."

"That's all over."

"But what do you mean to do?"

"Sink, die, disappear. If I make my fortune I'll come back."

"I can't make much of this kind of talk," I said.

"And yet you're a patient man, you're a good friend. I'm always conscious of that. I seem to take you for granted, but I think about you in the night. I'm shy and I never say to you the things I make up then—beautiful speeches of gratitude. I could be sentimental with you. Good friend. Old friend. I haven't much left. There are times when I feel that I want you to draw your breath in pain telling my story. Investigating myself o' nights I come on queer

vanities and little pockets of pride. You don't always remember what I've done. I've done five years. And now I go out into the void—with a melodramatic gesture."

"Don't talk nonsense," I said. "You annoy me."

"Well," he said, "I suppose it must be the usual five pounds."

I gave him a cheque for it upon our local bank as usual. He glanced at it and put it in his pocket. "There's a thing I want to say to you," he said. "All these years Helen has been your ideal of faithfulness. I know that. She has been staunch to me. And now you're a little uneasy. She has every reason to fall away from me, you think, and yet—she's staunch where she should be staunch. She has her children. It's natural, it's right. I suppose I'm not a good father. I'm not steadily affectionate. They touch my emotions sometimes and then I want to experiment with them. I might do them harm. There's something to be said for a safe old world. I've not been a great success. But the point is—the point—I had a point—yes, it is that Helen's all right. She's all right. I have no resentments. None. It's all gratitude to her, to Randal, to you. I make my acknowledgments. I don't know how you've stood me all this time."

He left me wondering, meditating; I had cause enough to mistrust him, but he seemed to mean more than usual.

That afternoon Mr. Judson, the Manager of our branch of the bank, called to see me. He was an un-

distinguished, hesitating little man and now he was apologetic and embarrassed. He fumbled in his pocket and produced my cheque. He had cashed it this morning, he said, but he had been uneasy. He had had a momentary doubt; he muttered something about unusual circumstances, he thought he ought to see me. He handed me the cheque. "I suppose this is all right?" he said. "It is a larger amount than usual and—you will pardon me—examination through a magnifying glass—the course of my duty—I really didn't know what——"

It was the cheque I had given to Marmaduke, but it was for fifty pounds. It was a shock to me, but my mind moved quickly. I said: "Is anything wrong? I thought I had more than that in the bank."

He gasped. He was relieved, but more embarrassed than ever. "Perfectly right," he said. "Perfectly. I am sorry to have troubled you."

He was ready to go but I thought it could hardly be left there. "What is the point?" I said.

"Oh!" he said, with a ludicrous attempt at lightness. "It's a trifle. I just wished to suggest—the writing on the cheque is a little indistinct—that is to say"—he stared at the cheque which was now in his hand—"it's strange."

I took it again. "I see, I see," I said. "You're very observant, Mr. Judson. You've caught me. I was making this out for five pounds as usual, forgetting that it was for a special purpose, and I thought I could alter my five into fifty all right. You're too sharp for me. What one will do to save twopence!"

He was still further relieved. He chuckled. "The alteration from five to fifty is the easiest that can be made," he said. "We have to keep our eyes open. You'll notice that the nought, too, has just a suspicion of being squeezed in. It's best to be careful. In case of forgery"—he stopped and went very pink—"I mean t'say, you'll understand that it's my duty to point these things out."

I agreed heartily. I had the satisfaction of feeling that I was a glib and accomplished liar. I was sorry for the poor man and pleased that I had been able to relieve his mind. I fancy he had had a suspicion at once and hadn't the pluck to act on it; he must have spent some miserable hours of indecision. Now he was almost cheerful. He hoped I should not think him officious. I said I thought he had done exactly right, that I was greatly obliged to him and would be very careful in future. We parted with much affability.

I sat down heavily in a chair in the sitting-room. It was a tremendous, an inexplicable blow. Marmaduke had been very much his usual self at lunch. I had had the fancy that he was mellowing; to the children he had been more tender than ironic. At the end of the meal he had held open the door for Helen and he stood for a moment looking after her. Trifles became significant. Where was he?

He wasn't in the house nor in the garden. I made surreptitious investigations which included hat pegs. He had gone out. He didn't come back to tea and that, though unusual, was not extraordinary. Helen

was placid among her clamorous children, permitting a degree of liberty, ruling them. Randal came home and, as usual, looked round for Marmaduke whose absence always made him uneasy. I said I hadn't seen him since lunch, and Randal frowned over that though, of course, the public-houses wouldn't be open. I felt that loyalty to our understanding might demand that I should tell him about the fifty pounds, but I was irresolute, sensitive to what he might say. Faint resentments that I couldn't justify or rationalize were growing against Randal and Helen. I've felt sometimes that I'm not strong enough, hard enough for the life that matters. I've taken pride sometimes in the ruthless attitude and it's easy enough to be ruthless on the general proposition; when the man or woman is close to you it's another thing. And I had become intimate with Marmaduke. I had almost ceased to struggle against him. His faults and weaknesses were not all. I had moments when I was ready to espouse his cause, accept his unuttered plea, a plea, if not of justification, of immense mitigations.

But this forgery! How strange that was! To do it again, to do it against me! Ought I to renounce him, to cast him into the outer darkness with hearty curses? One has reactions and I was indignant. Yet I wanted to know more, I wanted to understand. Only this morning he had been a serious person who couldn't be ignored. I didn't want to tell Randal yet, but he was my ally in this and I aspired to comradeship with him in our common life.

We grew anxious. Presently Randal went out and

I knew he was going to make a round of the public-houses. He detested it and I admired his faithfulness to his friend. I thought of offering to go with him but I felt that the dreary work would be useless; and yet I couldn't tell Randal. I thought of him going doggedly from one bar or taproom to another, looking round, inquiring, not sparing himself. Oh, Randal was a great fellow; I had a fleeting thought of Randal beaten and desolate, of Randal somehow in Marmaduke's place. One has a surge of pity sometimes for the man who is strong and sure. Some day he must come down, he must fail like the rest of us.

I had seen Randal's friendship for Marmaduke as very magnanimous, very beautiful. And now it was marred by impatience, disappointment, the inevitable reactions. You couldn't reasonably expect any one to stand Marmaduke, to go on standing him; he saw that himself. Randal was dogged in his friendship now, and I think that without doggedness the world is lost. He returned with empty hands from his excursion to the public-house. We had dinner almost silently. Helen was grave and calm and I couldn't estimate the tenor of her thoughts. We went about our ordinary occupations; Helen was at her perpetual sewing and darning, while Randal and I read intermittently. At about 10 o'clock, a note was handed to me. It had been brought from the station by the out-porter, said the maid. I opened it and glanced hastily down the page. "Get the man. Bring him back," I said to Randal, who rushed out and presently returned with old Sam Tidd, the porter. He

could not tell us much. Mr. Abney had gone by the 3.18, carrying a bag. He had told Tidd to deliver the note at 10 o'clock and it had been three minutes late, but that was because he met Mr. Patterson and had taken his instructions about luggage for the 8.57 in the morning. But for that Tidd would have delivered the note at 10 sharp. Yes, Mr. Abney had paid him.

I resisted a ridiculous inclination to ask whether Mr. Abney looked cheerful.

While Randal was pursuing Tidd, Helen and I sat silent. She looked at the note in my hand and waited while I made another and less casual inspection of it. She was not incurious but her characteristic reticence made for patience. I was secretly agitated. When Tidd had left us I began to read the letter again. With a slight impatience in her voice she said: "Has he gone?" I said: "Yes, Marmaduke has gone." To be silent any longer wasn't fair to them, but I felt sadly unequal to discussion. Helen held out her hand for the letter, but I hadn't made up my mind about that. This was addressed to me. I said: "He will write to you," though Marmaduke had not said so. Then, after a pause, I said: "I don't want to show you this." She drew back her hand and waited.

"He has gone," I said. "It's impossible to say exactly what that means. He does not speak of returning."

"You mean that he will never come back?"

"It may be so," I said.

"What money had he?" said Randal.

"We'll talk of that presently," I said. I was stupidly intent on procrastination.

Helen said: "I am entitled to know everything."

"Yes," I said, "but will you forgive me if I don't show you this now? I want to think about it. He writes intimately to me. Helen, he has gone away believing that it's best for you and for the children. He thinks it well that he should disappear entirely from your lives. I don't know whether he is capable of keeping to that. Perhaps not. But he is trying—trying——"

She said: "What horrible things are in that letter?"

"No, no," I said. I handed it to her. She held it looking at me. I thought she was going to give it back to me, after the manner of stage magnanimities, but her curiosity prevailed, as well it might. She, indeed, had the right to know.

"But, what!" she cried. "He forged again?"

"Forged!" said Randal.

"It's a trifle—a trifle," I said. "He explains and I accept the explanation."

She read the letter through. She said: "Yes, he has gone," and then "Poor Marmaduke!" She shed tears and I was thankful for them. I took the letter from her and handed it to Randal. Before I read it I told them of Mr. Judson's visit. "What an old intriguer you are," said Randal with a gallant, pathetic attempt at lightness. I thought: This must bring us together, not separate us. I have my children; I must have my children.

Helen said: "Do you think forgery can be hereditary?"

I could have laughed at her naïve conceptions of science but I answered with a grave negative. "And," I continued, "this isn't the same thing at all; you mustn't regard this as forgery; it's only that technically. He knew that, at the last resort, I would gladly let him have the money. Yes, he knew that if this was his deliberate will I would let him have it for this purpose."

Randal said: "What purpose?"

I didn't answer that. I read from the letter, taking it from Randal's hands: "I steal this money, then, from my friend, knowing him. Yes, I know you and you won't be troubled by this technical offence. I play this mean trick because I think it's the best way. I could not face the remonstrances, the persuasions. Perhaps I should have seen through them the fear that they might prevail."

"Yes," said Helen, "he loves you best now."

"He has gone," I said. "Perhaps he has not the power to keep away. I see something very strange and fine in the effort. This forgery is nothing."

"What can he do?" said Randal.

"Why is it fine of him to desert us?" said Helen.

"His line of least resistance is to stay on here," I said. "This house is the one effectual refuge in the world for him. I should never have turned him out. He knows that. His departure is a kind of suicide. If he comes back it's a terrible failure."

"It wouldn't be his first failure," Randal said.

"You are bitter," I said. "You are less generous than usual."

"Suicide!" Helen said.

And I was bitter too. I have my vein of cruelty even for those I love. "He leaves you in peace," I said. "He leaves you your children. As Randal says, he can do nothing. He is totally incompetent."

"Is that a virtue?" Randal said.

I disdained to answer that. I felt estranged from them. I did not understand Helen. I see her sometimes as an implacable woman. Randal, I suppose, resented his own failure to stem, to save, to guide.

Helen said: "Shall we know where he is? Do you know where he has gone?"

I shook my head. Then she said: "Randy must be told everything some day."

Randal hesitated on his way out of the room. He stopped before me and said: "I am sorry, Father." I nodded and let him go. And then Helen came to me, inviting the caresses that I was hardly ready to give. "Have I done wrong?" she said. "Is it all my fault? Will you never forgive me?"

I held her in my arms. I was vaguely comforting but I was desolate and hurt. I acted the affectionate father something against the grain. My philosophy was not equal to the occasion. I should have been glad to give that queer kind of consolation, the appropriate word, but I couldn't think of it. I wanted to say that we suffered this together, but it wouldn't have been true. She breathed again: "Poor Marmaduke!"

and I suspected an effort to placate me. Yet I was thankful, I was almost grateful for it.

The children had long since gone to bed. I followed her upstairs to them. I wanted to see her with them, and I went with her from one room to the other. She looked at them earnestly, carefully. She adjusted their bedclothes, the windows and doors. She tolerated my presence, forgot it, welcomed it. This was the centre of her life, and the other might have been a tale that was told. I was partly comforted; it seemed that reconciliation, a full tide of affection, might be before us. And had not Marmaduke known this?

Chapter 19

And so he went out into the dark; he vanished utterly. Was it merely a futile gesture? Would he return presently to discuss his failure in all its bearings? It is our way to connect renunciation with apotheosis. It's disconcerting when it must be followed by degradation. What could Marmaduke do but sink and sink? He had his eyes open. I tried to pursue his thought, to conceive something of his state of mind, and it hurt me sharply. It is the habit of the sceptic to assay, to review the motives. Was there some ignoble relief in getting away from us? Would he sink into vice, into crime? Would he starve? Or would he come halting back with all his poor vestiges of pride destroyed? What changes, doublings, were possible yet? I didn't want him to go away and I was afraid of his coming back. Yet sometimes I thought of going out to search for him as Mr. Peggotty went after Little Em'ly. It came upon me that he might want to be rescued, but I did not stir. I suppose I had formed my ideal of him, and the idealist is cruel.

He never came back. We used to look out for him, to watch the road, to listen to the unexpected step. As time went on I felt safer; yes, safer. I wanted him and I exulted in his absence. In some dim way he had stuck it out. He had let us alone; and he had gone without resentment. I think he died very

soon; I have always ridiculed feelings in such a case, but I feel that he is dead. I have the ridiculous belief that I hold him complete; there is no bitterness left; I accept him now.

I am thankful that my children are not estranged from me. All possibility of that has melted away. Helen is secure with her children. She leads them the way that they should go, the way that the others have gone. I might rebel sometimes against her assurance, her placidity, but it seems that I do not. When Marmaduke passed into the limbo outside the ordinary life she had her period of sadness; even, I think, some luxury of grief. She is puzzled with me sometimes and doesn't know what I want from her. She is ranged, she is of her world; all is for the best and an excellent Providence over all. She adheres to the pious legends and her children are well started in them.

There have been times when I thought that my beloved Helen was lost to me. I set it down with a kind of shame. I won't pretend, I won't smooth away; one must take things as they are. Perhaps it is better to die when your ideals are intact. Helen and I have come together again, and it is not because she answers all the demands of my strenuous life, but because I ask for less. I grow old, I cannot slight what I have. Yes, she's inarticulate, she's one of the great forces of nature; she's not a pioneer, not a passionate spirit, but we are deeply united in affection. Perhaps Randal could give me more of what I crave, but we have always been cautious with one another. His life is

apart, it is beyond my ken. We are great friends and some day, when I have overcome my fear of being thought sentimental, I may know him better. And always there are my grandchildren.

It was not till many months after Marmaduke had gone that I came upon his unfinished letter to Randy —" to Randy at the age of "—and then came a blank; he hadn't decided what the age must be. The letter was like a rough draft, with erasures and substitutions, and it became fragmentary. He must have written it and abandoned it within a few days of his going away. He had stuffed it into the back of a drawer and left it there.

My dear Randy,—

When you read this I shall have been dead for years. You will nearly have forgotten me, but resentments live long. I think that sometimes you loved me. Let me think that. Sometimes I nearly hated you, and that was because I craved your affection. One doesn't demand a passion from a little boy, but a father wants affection.

I suppose I haven't a case. I wasn't a good member of society. Something was left out when I was made. But I'm writing as though to a child, and you're not that now. What are you? A clean, implacable young man? Supercilious? Indulgent? Anger surges over me as in those old days when you looked at me disapprovingly. You didn't know about that and I think nobody knew. I might have struck you. I might have done something more stupid and

violent than usual. But I was always in terror of alienating you, of spoiling my chances. I suppose I've lived a reckless life, but I've had my little canninesses. I've despised myself for them.

Don't think I'm reproaching you. You were a good little fellow, acting naturally. We used to get on famously sometimes, didn't we? Do you remember— I can only think of you as a little boy, as you are when I write this.

I don't know why I write. I have nothing to say. Fathers give their sons advice and incitement, but how could I do that to you? I'm not a Polonius. I'm an unknown quantity. I'm flighty, trivial, unstable. I suppose so. I've done outrageous things wantonly. My punishment is just? Would you say that, you damned little prig? Perhaps there's stupidity in justice.

I go away now. I trouble you no more. I leave you all and you'll never see me again. I write solemnly, as a dying man might. Another of my tricks? If I can be solemn and serious why can't I settle down and be a father to do you credit? It's no use. I can't keep it up. Do you think I haven't tried? Let whoever made me take the blame. Do you believe in a Judgment Day? That old nonsense? I won't submit tamely. But they'll tell me I'm trivial and irrelevant. Hard, smooth, regular things will roll over me.

I know myself too well. There are times when I've no mysteries left. I'm tired of myself. I'm tired of trying. I'm tired of constancy, of the world, of my life. I've one tenacity. I shan't come back. It would

be hateful, horrible to come back. I give up control. All my goodness will be wasted. I shall lose my niceties, become raffish, soon come to an end. I am all things—a fool, an ingrate, a martyr. I act like a madman and I'm dreadfully sane. I tell you everything and I tell you nothing. There is nothing. My poor boy, how can you understand—can you face—what's the good?

And so it ended.

I suppose I shall show this to Randy some day. I don't know. I suppose it depends on what Randy is like. He may be a brisk, intelligent young fellow ready to interest himself in a curious document. I have queer resentments. He wrote this to Randy, not to me. I think I shall not show it to Helen; I must ask Randal's advice.

My memories of Marmaduke must fade. All things must fade or lose their life in rigidity. "Poor fellow," people say, and if they heard of his death they would say it is a blessed release. To me it seems that a light has gone out of the world. Well, I shall dedicate my coming book to him. That's a trifle, perhaps, but I hold to it; it gives me a queer kind of comfort. I revolve terms, I concoct grandiose, towering inscriptions, I try to get in words like "heroical" and "gallant soul." Why not? I can imagine Randal ridiculing them, but I am not sure that he would. I protest against all shallow sympathisers. "I'll show them," as the children say. He failed, certainly. I don't care. We all fail. "Let us but love each other," he quoted

once. He was never sentimental, I think; he was even cynical as a boy. Yes, I'll surprise them with that dedication. Can I mean that? Yes, and infinitely more. I wonder what Helen will say to it. I look forward to showing it to her. Not in reproach—oh, no!—but in deep, deep sympathy. I suppose I am a bit of a sentimentalist. Yet Marmaduke kept us alive, he got the best out of us; I shall never apologize for Marmaduke.

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